

S.Korea lifts ban on stem cell research

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A scientist looks at a colony of embryonic stem cells. South Korea has conditionally lifted a ban on stem cell research using human eggs, three years after outlawing the practice because a scientist was found to have faked his work.

South Korea on Wednesday conditionally lifted a ban on stem cell research using human eggs, three years after outlawing the practice because a scientist was found to have faked his work.

The national committee on bioethics said it agreed to approve a new research project provided its scientists met certain conditions.

A team from Seoul's Cha General Hospital had sought approval for its stem cell project using aborted human eggs to develop cures for grave human diseases.

The committee gave it the go-ahead on four conditions.

The hospital must secure fresh written consent from egg donors, focus on lab animals to minimise the use of such eggs and set up an internal screening body to check for possible abuse.

It should also remove references from the project title that could give people false hope. The title mentions "[stem cell research](#) which can cure diseases such as Parkinson's."

"This research that we have conditionally approved today is really just the very first step towards a new academic study," bioethics committee chief Roh Jae-Kyung told reporters.

"Though we hope this will eventually become a ray of hope for those patients with an incurable disease, we want you to refrain from premature or excessive expectations."

The committee banned research using human eggs in 2006 after Hwang Woo-Suk's claims that he created the first human [stem cells](#) through cloning were ruled to be bogus.

South Korean scientists had urged the government to relax its ban, especially after US President [Barack Obama](#) this year lifted a ban on federal funding for such research.

The hospital's leading researcher, Chung Hyung-Min, welcomed the committee's decision and said he would try to meet its conditions.

"The decision will help reactivate stem cell research in [South Korea](#)," Chung said.

"Stem cell research has been done by scientists in Britain and other countries. But there has been no successful case yet, using human eggs," he said.

Lee said the hospital would build the world's largest stem cell research and treatment centre in southern Seoul by 2013.

The bioethics committee has rejected a similar request from Hwang, who is now engaged in animal cloning but wants to begin a new embryonic stem cell research project using eggs from aborted fetuses.

Hwang, still on trial for fraud, embezzlement, ethical breaches and other charges, has insisted in court that he could prove he created the first cloned human stem cells.

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