

## New grant for cutting-edge clinical research to help shape future therapies

Novo Nordisk Foundation awards grant of DKK 100 million to promote the translation of research results into novel therapies targeting stem cells in blood cancer and diabetes.

The Novo Nordisk Foundation has awarded a grant of DKK 100 million for strengthening and developing translational research at the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Stem Cell Biology, DanStem at the University of Copenhagen. The grant will contribute to translating the Center's research results into new cancer and diabetes therapies for the benefit of patients.

The Foundation awarded the grant for establishing a new research programme, the Programme for Translational Hematology focusing on blood cancer. With the Programme, the Center aims to establish a platform for testing new drugs and identifying potential new targets for developing new therapies for patients with blood cancer. The Programme could have a major impact on treatment of haematological malignancies. The primary aim is to identify novel treatments for patients with blood cancers AML (Acute Myeloid Leukaemia) and MDS (Myelodysplastic Syndrome) for which treatments and success rates have changed little in the last decades.

Professor at DanStem and the Biotech Research & Innovation Centre (BRIC) Kristian Helin will head the Programme, which will include collaboration with researchers from Rigshospitalet, Denmark's largest hospital. Major activities include:

- Identifying and characterizing cancer stem cells from patients with blood cancer;
- Identifying the best available treatment for individual patients by screening patient-derived cancer stem cells for sensitivity toward a panel of approved drugs (personalized medicine); and
- Collaborating with companies to develop new drugs for treating blood cancer.

DanStem has primarily focused on conducting basic research since it was established in 2010. Research topics have included how to induce stem cells to differentiate into certain types of cells and the specific role of cancer stem cells in developing different types of cancer. The Center is now ready to take the next step and focus more on translating promising scientific findings and methods into new more targeted and efficient therapies.

To further strengthen its translational research, the Center will reallocate DKK 32 million from its current budget to the developing new therapies for diabetes.

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Novo Nordisk Fonden  
Tuborg Havnevej 19  
DK-2900 Hellerup  
Denmark

novonordiskfonden.dk  
+45 3527 6600  
VAT no.: 10 58 29 89

**Senior Press officer**  
Christian Mostrup Scheel  
+45 3067 4805  
cims@novo.dk

Henrik Semb, Executive Director of the Center says: "This acknowledges that our basic research is paving the way towards promising translational applications in cancer and diabetes. The new grant and reallocation of resources to translational research will boost our efforts to, via preclinical and future clinical trials, develop new treatments and cures in haematological cancers and type 1 diabetes."

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Kristian Helin, Head of the Programme says: "We would like to thank the Novo Nordisk Foundation for the support, which will greatly strengthen the ties between basic and clinical research and hopefully lead to the development of new treatment for AML and MDS."

Dagnia Looms, Head of Strategic Awards of the Novo Nordisk Foundation says: "The Novo Nordisk Foundation strives to improve the health and welfare of people. With the new grant, we aim to contribute to bringing promising research results closer to the clinic and thereby strengthen Denmark's position internationally within this important research field. The ultimate goal is to improve patient treatment."

Until now, DanStem (Danish Stem Cell Center) has comprised two sections: the Novo Nordisk Foundation Section for Basic Stem Cell Biology (BasicStem) supported by the Novo Nordisk Foundation and the Section for Translational Stem Cell Research and Therapy, which was supported by Innovation Fund Denmark. In connection with the new grant, the two sections are now merging into one centre called the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Stem Cell Biology, DanStem.

#### **About the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Stem Cell Biology, DanStem**

The Center is located at the University of Copenhagen and has about 150 staff members. It focuses on conducting basic and translational research within developmental, stem cell and molecular biology. The ambition is to generate knowledge that will form the basis for developing more targeted and efficient therapies for diabetes and cancer. Since 2010, the Novo Nordisk Foundation has awarded grants totaling DKK 685 million (€92.1 million) for establishing and expanding the Center. <http://danstem.ku.dk/>

#### **About the Novo Nordisk Foundation**

The Novo Nordisk Foundation is a Danish foundation with corporate interests. The Foundation has two objectives: 1) to provide a stable basis for the commercial and research activities of the companies in the Novo Group; and 2) to support scientific, humanitarian and social purposes. The vision of the Foundation is to contribute significantly to research and development that improves the health and welfare of people. Since 2010, the Foundation has donated more than DKK 10 billion (€1.2 billion), primarily for research at public institutions and hospitals in Denmark and the other Nordic countries. Read more at [www.novonordiskfoundation.com](http://www.novonordiskfoundation.com)

#### **Further information**

Naomi Dayan, Communication Officer, Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Stem Cell Biology, DanStem, phone: +45 2364 9098, [naomi.dayan@sund.ku.dk](mailto:naomi.dayan@sund.ku.dk)  
Christian Mostrup Scheel, Senior Press Officer, Novo Nordisk Foundation, phone: +45 3067 4805, [cims@novo.dk](mailto:cims@novo.dk)