Welcome address

Dear Participants,

On behalf of the Stem Cell Network North Rhine–Westphalia I warmly welcome you to our 4th International Meeting to be held in Düsseldorf, Germany.

The Stem Cell Network NRW is an initiative of the North Rhine–Westphalian Ministry of Innovation, Science, Research and Technology. This Network is unique in Germany, and we are happy to celebrate our fifth anniversary with so many guests. The Network assembles two Working Groups that are concerned with aspects of biomedical research on the one hand, and ethical, legal and sociological issues on the other. This characteristic combination is yet again strongly reflected in our Meeting's programme, including in our Keynote Lectures.

The first Keynote Lecture this year will be given by Ron McKay of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes. He is considered one of the pioneers in stem cell research, with a strong interest in neural stem cells – from the perspective of both basic and applied science. Having 20 years' experience, McKay was honoured with the Ernst Schering Award in 2004 for his excellent work in stem cell research.

Ludger Honnefelder will introduce the bioethical part of the meeting in the second Keynote Lecture. He is the founder of the Institute for Science and Ethics and the German Reference Center for Ethics in the Biosciences, and is active in a variety of bio-ethical committees, including the Bio-Ethics Steering Committee of the European Advisory Board, as well as being Chairman of the Working Group on Ethical and Legal Aspects of the Stem Cell Network. In January 2007, Honnefelder was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit.

In our aging western society, we see ourselves confronted with an increasing occurrence of degenerative diseases. Regenerative medicine aims to develop cell-based therapeutic concepts for a variety of diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and neuro-degeneration. Outstanding experts in their respective fields will therefore in two sessions on Aging and Regeneration address the implications of stem cells in aging-related conditions and discuss the consequences of such future therapies at a socio-political level.

Supporting the concept that research on both adult and embryonic stem cells will synergistically enhance our understanding of their general biology, we dedicate additional sessions to Stem Cell Self Renewal, the Role of the Biological Niche, Cancer and Stem Cells, Mechanisms Regulating the Stem Cell State, and to the Translation of Stem Cell Technologies.

We are confident that our multifaceted programme of lectures and presentations has something to offer each participant. Bringing together experts from the various disciplines, we foresee that you will be able to exchange exciting ideas during the poster sessions or the boat trip on the Rhine River.

We look forward to meeting you in Düsseldorf!
Sincerely yours,

Hans Schöler
Head of the Managing Board