

Masayo Takahashi awarded inaugural Ogawa-Yamanaka Stem Cell Prize

September 11, 2015— Masayo Takahashi, project leader of the Laboratory for Retinal Regeneration at the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology has been named the inaugural winner of the Ogawa-Yamanaka Stem Cell Prize by the Gladstone Institutes (San Francisco, USA). The prize, which recognizes “individuals whose original translational research has advanced cellular reprogramming technology for regenerative medicine,” was awarded to Takahashi for her “trailblazing work leading the first clinical trial to use induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells in humans.”

Takahashi, in collaboration with the Foundation for Biomedical Research and Innovation (FBRI) and the Kobe City Medical Center General Hospital, launched a clinical study to test the safety of using iPS cells in humans as a treatment for age-related macular degeneration (AMD), an eye disease primarily affecting the elderly, and conducted the first surgical transplant of iPS cell-derived retinal tissue in September 2014.



Masayo Takahashi, project leader of
Laboratory for Retinal Regeneration

On receiving this award, she says, “I feel grateful and honored to be selected as the first recipient of the Ogawa-Yamanaka Stem Cell Prize. I embarked on the path to the first clinical application of iPS cells, being confident about its success, and am sufficiently satisfied with our achievements. I would like to share the added great pleasure of this announcement with the many people who have supported our project.”

The Ogawa-Yamanaka Stem Cell Prize was established at the Gladstone Institutes through a donation from Mr. Hiro Ogawa, a philanthropist who has long supported innovative biomedical research, and in commemoration of the achievements of Shinya Yamanaka, professor at Kyoto University and senior investigator at Gladstone Institutes, who won the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his discovery of iPS cells. In a press release by the Gladstone Institutes, Yamanaka, who is also a member of the Scientific Award Committee for the prize, says, “It is extremely gratifying to see iPS cell technology applied in humans only eight years after its discovery.”

In the same press release, George Daley, professor of hematology/oncology and director of the Stem Cell Transplantation Program at the Boston Children’s Hospital, comments, “By confronting and ultimately solving the many regulatory challenges of a first-in-human trial, Dr. Takahashi has paved the way for all of us in the stem cell community to recognize the promise of iPS cells.”

The Gladstone Institutes also lauds Takahashi for carrying out the pilot study with “an appropriate degree of caution.”

The prize will be presented to Takahashi at a ceremony held on September 15 at the Gladstone Institutes, where she will also be giving a scientific presentation. Her presentation will be available for viewing via live streaming.