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## Stem cell researcher returns

*By: LAURA BERMAN*

San Diego is as good as gulags get.

But Dr. Eva Feldman, the stem cell research scientist, prefers Michigan.

She's packed up her research, "the ideas and the people" and closed her laboratory at the University of California, San Diego.

Feldman longed to be closer to her patients and fellow researchers at the University of Michigan, where she leads the A. Alfred Taubman Medical Research Institute.

And a state law passed in November, and a new U.S. president with new policies on stem cell research, have created a warmer climate for Feldman and other Michigan bioscientists. "It's amazing, how different it is," she says, by telephone, preparing to return to Ann Arbor today.

### **'Such a battle'**

When I last wrote about Feldman in September, she was debating the stem cell research issue publicly. "It's been such a battle, but we've come a long way in four months. It's really amazing."

Six months ago, the hypercharged politics of stem cell research, and the Michigan law banning some embryonic stem cell research, gave scientists like Feldman dual public identities: They were heroic doctors, struggling to overcome political opposition to cure disease. Or escapees from the Sci-Fi Channel, toying with trouble in a petri dish.

Six months ago, Feldman planned research in San Diego because she faced civil and criminal penalties for doing the same research in Michigan. The first phase is complete, and she's preparing to publish the results in two medical journals.

Since then, changes in federal policy and funding have also become more favorable: She's furiously rewriting grant requests to comply with new funding for stem cell research, part of \$10 billion in newly announced stimulus funding.

### **Changing her focus**

Because she is no longer working with hands tied behind her back, her time can be dedicated for the work she hopes will lead to a cure for ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. That's why Taubman, the real estate developer, gave \$44 million to found the medical research institute. The animal research she's done, she says, suggests the therapy "offers a decrease in the progression" of the disease, results she deems provocative and solid enough to soon apply on an experimental basis to people.

"It's frustrating when people say that this research hasn't produced a cure when, until now, I haven't been able to do one experiment in my own Michigan laboratory," says Feldman.

As an explorer in this brave new world, Feldman's optimism and energy are infectious -- in a good way. Her goal is simple and straightforward: to find a cure for a deadly disease that causes untold suffering. With the road clear, she looks forward to the next 10 years of hard toil at home.