

May 1, 2008

## Stem cell panel expedites postdoctoral, research grants

*State commission expects to award \$23M*

*BY STEVE BERBERICH | STAFF WRITER*

The state's Stem Cell Research Commission is getting its act together. The panel, which this year will award \$23 million in grants, recently finished its selection process, nearly two months ahead of its pace in 2007, its inaugural year. It even canceled a planned second review meeting last week.

"Last year was our implementation year. This year, we have really streamlined the process," said Renée Winsky, director of the Maryland Technology Development Corp., the commission's administrative agency.

The panel last year awarded \$15 million to 24 projects. But the process was delayed because of some scheduling problems and confusion over who had final say on the recommendations, Winsky said.

The group also ironed out conflict-of-interest questions, leading to a smoother process this year, said Bowen P. Weisheit of the Maryland chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, who serves as a patient-advocate member of the commission.

"Some things we learned from going through the process helped refine it this year," Weisheit said. Overall, "I think it is fulfilling its original purpose, for which, hopefully, with the continued funding, it will be able to continue."

This year, the grant recommendations will be made to Tedco, probably at its next meeting on May 8, with funding available before the end of fiscal 2008, on June 30, Winsky said.

The grants can be used for researching both adult and embryonic stem cells.

Legislators this year cited last year's delays while considering cutting money for the program next year. To help keep a lid on spending, lawmakers and Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), after considerable haggling, eventually agreed to cut fiscal '09 spending on the program to \$19 million.

"That was certainly a fascinating process to watch, going from 23 to zero to five then 15 and finally 19," Winsky said of the General Assembly's dickering.