

Stem-Cell Patents Set to Be Tossed

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Federal regulators said they are preparing to toss out three key patents related to human embryonic stem cells, a move that could ease concerns over commercial control of the work.

The Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, an arm of the University of Wisconsin that controls the school's patents, owns the patents and has 60 days to respond and seek to change the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's ruling, issued Friday. The ruling was made public yesterday by the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights and the Public Patent Foundation, which challenged the validity of the patents.

University of Wisconsin researcher Jamie Thomson was the first to isolate human embryonic stem cells in 1997, and the university patented his discovery and has been collecting fees from researchers since.

The university said it would fight the U.S. patent office's preliminary decision.

In January, the university waived some of its fees after receiving complaints that its policies were stifling research.

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