

Communicating science to the public

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At the most recent meeting of the Japan Society for Regenerative Medicine last March, we conducted a discussion about how researchers in the field are communicating their findings to the general public. It is increasingly clear that there exists disconnect between the two groups. Scientists are primarily concerned with conveying their results, which involves explaining complex ideas in a manner that can be grasped by the wider public. The public itself, however, is more interested in understanding how regenerative medicine will impact society at the daily level.

This past January, Japan approved of new policy that considers the relationship between science and technology and society along with promoting new science and technology innovations. Recognizing the importance of strong and sustained public support, the policy puts emphasis on communication. However, as I alluded to above, the content of the communication will need to be

adjusted in order to satisfy the information the public demands.

Japan's attention to regenerative medicine took a significant leap in 2013 with new laws. The Pharmaceutical Affairs Law aims to expedite the development of regenerative medicine by putting an emphasis on safety, whereas beforehand translation from the bench to the clinic was viewed as exceptionally slow. Importantly, the law was revised to expand the regulations that applied to medicines and medical equipment to cellular and genetic therapeutic products as well. These changes have garnered large attention around the world and have made Japan an interesting case study to see how regenerative medicine proceeds compared with other nations. However, the emphasis on communication indicates the need for establishing good relations and trust with the public regardless of the scientific outcomes.

Uehiro Ethics Workshop

In its effort to keep the general public informed about the latest in stem cell research, the Uehiro Research Division for iPS Cell Ethics held a workshop, "iPS cell research and iPS ethics," on February 10. Conditional of its support, the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education asks the ethics unit at CiRA to prepare annual events like this one. This year's was held at the Kyoto University Museum, where four of our bioethicists spoke about their research to the 40 people in attendance. Talks included discussion about stem cell science, how stem cell research is conducted throughout the world, and the use of stem cells in private clinics.



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