Perspectives from the New Editor-in-Chief, Martin Pera

Stem Cell Reports is one of the most important achievements of the International Society for Stem Cell Research over the past five years, and I’m honored to become its next editor-in-chief. The journal is in a very strong position, thanks to the efforts of my predecessor Christine Mummery, who has done a fantastic job founding the journal and guiding it through its first five years. I am now beginning to appreciate the exceptional work of Managing Editor Yvonne Fischer, the ISSCR Publications Committee, and ISSCR Scientific Affairs Manager Jack Mosher and his predecessor Heather Rooke, and their invaluable contributions to making the journal a success.

Maintaining High Quality
As a journal run by scientists for scientists, Stem Cell Reports benefits from an excellent reputation for fair, timely, and transparent review. In recent months, I have been focusing on the contents of the journal and have been impressed by the consistent scientific quality and novelty of findings. In addition to maintaining these key attributes, my foremost concern will be to ensure that Stem Cell Reports remains the destination of choice for excellent stem cell science, alongside Cell Stem Cell, which serves a rather different and complementary role in the field. Inevitably we need to be mindful of the journal’s standing in the citations rankings; however, many scientists are aware of the flaws of the impact factor metric, and we will be looking at other quantitative means of assessing the journal’s performance, including the citation frequency distribution. Ultimately, our goal is for everyone in the field to see the ISSCR journal as an influential and attractive venue for communicating breakthrough science and as the leading vehicle for lively discussion of controversies and matters arising in stem cell science and policy.

Contributions from ISSCR Members
The journal relies on the support and engagement of the ISSCR at all levels: its Board of Directors, who are leaders in the field; early- and mid-career researchers, who are the future; and Asian constituencies, from which some of the strongest new voices in stem cell science are emerging. We are committed to ensuring the journal’s editorial board represents diversity and intellectual rigor across the field. Like the ISSCR, the journal will increasingly engage with the clinical translation community and the biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and regulatory sectors to solicit findings in the application of stem cell science in drug development and regenerative medicine.

Capturing Basic and Emerging Science
Early translational efforts are exhilarating to watch but are also liable to raise more questions than they answer. The journal will therefore renew its unwavering commitment to publish fundamental studies in stem cell biology, and related research in development and tissue regeneration, that will continue to underpin progress in the field. We will be especially interested to consider work in expanding areas of investigation, including human development and developmental models, in vitro organoid and organ-on-a-chip bioengineering, and stem cell systems biology, to name a view. From my perspective at the Jackson Laboratory, a leading center for mouse genetics, I will also be very keen to look at novel work in model systems that sheds light on mechanisms of stem cell regulation or provides new insight or new technological approaches in cell therapy. As in the past, we are happy to carry out fast-track reviews on high-quality studies that have been declined at other journals if the previous reviews indicate the work meets our criteria for scientific merit and novelty.

Leading the Stem Cell Field
Beginning this year, the journal will dedicate several pages per issue to front matter content that highlights ISSCR activities and member achievements, singles out
new studies of interest in Stem Cell Reports and other journals, and provides a platform for commentary on scientific issues, science policy, careers, funding, and other topics of broad interest to our readership. We aim to publish several Reviews each year on areas of relevance to the field, and Commentaries and Perspectives that offer fresh overviews on science or policy matters. I welcome suggestions for these latter three forms of content.

Building on Progress
2018 marked the 20th anniversary of the discovery of human embryonic stem cells. Two years after Jamie Thomson’s findings, Alan Trounson, Benjamin Reubinoff, and I published a review in the Journal of Cell Science that began with what seemed to be impossibly ambitious projections about what might be accomplished with this new and controversial research tool. Today, it is remarkable to see how many of those far-reaching goals have been achieved, or are well on the way to being realized, and how many totally unpredictable advances have occurred in the interim (reprogramming cells to pluripotency by defined factors is one that comes to mind). The pace of progress in the field only continues to accelerate, and I look forward to working with all of you to tell our story.

Learn more about my vision for Stem Cell Reports in this video interview.

Martin Pera
Editor-in-Chief, Stem Cell Reports
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Author/s:
Pera, M

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