



<http://cbs5.com/consumer/stem.cell.research.2.916561.html>

Obama Administration Could Boost Bay Area Biotech

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By Sue Kwon

Bay Area biotech firms are asking the Obama administration for an increase in federal funds for stem cell research and job training. Scientists believe the changing of the guard will mean fewer restrictions and more funds for Bay Area companies involved in stem cell science.

At FivePrime Therapeutics in San Francisco's Mission Bay, scientists are discovering proteins that can help stem cells grow in ways that can improve and save lives.

Founder Dr. Rusty Willaims said, "We have the factors that can act on stem cells that can help them become the cells you want at the end of the day. For example an insulin producing cell, or a heart cell or nerve cell." He said the science could eventually lead to therapies for cancer and regeneration of diseased tissues and organs.

It's stem cell science that may not have received a lot of attention in the past because under the Bush administration research attached to embryonic stem cells drew controversy. Anti-abortion groups backing the former President opposed the use of stem cells from embryos. FivePrime Therapeutics conducts research on embryonic as well as adult stem cells using private funds.

Dr. Williams believes the future could bring much needed federal support to his industry. "The new administration is very enthusiastic in embracing science. That will affect the culture of scientists," he said.

Travis Miller with Bay Bio, a group representing Bay Area biotech firms has asked the Obama administration for a 5 percent increase in NIH funding.

If the money comes through, it will help pay for training future biotech employees. "This isn't just researchers with PhDs. This is training for community college students, CSU students, like at Ohlone College, Skyline College. These opportunities are available," Miller said.

The ongoing construction in San Francisco's Mission Bay biotech corridor supports his prediction that there will be growth in the life science sector. But, he recognizes state resources are jeopardized by the current budget crisis and private investment is threatened by the economic downturn, making federal support more important than ever.