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New Stem Cell Research

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Beyond the promise for the sick and injured, Bay area scientists are hoping the Obama administration will bring a much needed boost to stem cell research, biotech, and the Bay area economy.

At FivePrime Therapeutics, scientists are discovering proteins that can help stem cells grow in ways that can improve and save lives. Dr. Rusty Williams, PhD, Fiveprime Founder says, "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." ounder Dr. Rusty Williams says the science could eventually lead to therapies for cancer, 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. He and other Bay Area scientists believe the future will be different... "The new administration is very enthusiastic in embracing science. That will affect the culture of scientists," says, Williams.

Travis Miller of Bay Bio says, "we are confident the new administration will provide a few opportunities." Travis Miller with Bay Bio, an organization representing Bay Area biotech companies, has asked the new administration to help pay for research and job training. "This isn't just researchers with PhD's. This is community college students, C.S.U. students, and Skyline College for whom these opportunities are available," says Miller. The construction in San Francisco's Mission Bay biotech corridor supports his prediction that there will be growth in the life science sector.

But state resources are jeopardized by the current budget crisis and private investment is threatened by the economic downturn so federal support is more important than ever. Williams says, "There is a lot of work going on. I think new companies will come from this and new therapies will help people will come from this." Biotech firms are not immune to the economic downturn, Bay Bio has seen layoffs. But there are also more companies starting up during this downturn and there are new jobs being added.