**HEARING RESTORATION PROJECT**

The Hearing Health Foundation has published a summary and update of the ongoing “Hearing Restoration Project”. They released this update last month. It is an update of research that could someday reverse the loss of hearing due to ear hair cell loss (we can only hope). Here is the update:

“Since its creation more than three years ago, the Hearing Restoration Project (HRP) consortium has gathered twice annually for scientific meetings; these interactions have proven to produce meaningful research outcomes.

At the meeting held in Seattle last fall, 15 researchers convened to compare and discuss data from the past year and to plan for the coming year's projects. During the discussions, five of the investigators were surprised to find that they had independently observed the same result-one that was so surprising that each had initially dismissed it as an experimental artifact.

Here's what they all observed separately: In an adult mouse cochlea that had previously lost its hair cells due to damage from sound or drugs, weeks later, a few cells remaining in the cochlea began to display molecular markers related to hair cells.

These results may suggest that the supporting cells in the cochlea are more responsive to damage than we thought, and that they were trying to convert into new hair cells. That fact that the five different groups experienced the same observation using very different methods added considerable weight to the findings, and emphasizes the value of the collaborative, data-sharing approach to science utilized by the HRP.

These observations were discussed among the 15 investigators, and a new project was born to further investigate what were provisionally labeled "X-cells." Given the flexibility of the HRP's funding process, the consortium was able to fast-track a proposal. The investigators wrote the proposal in a few weeks and vetted it with the rest of their HRP colleagues. The proposal was then evaluated and approved by the Scientific Advisory Board of the HRP, and the project is now moving forward.

The HRP hopes to see exciting results from this project, which should establish whether these "X-cells" are real. If so, the HRP will determine how to push them further along their molecular differentiation pathway to become full-fledged hair cells, and to eventually restore hearing.

HHF understands the value of the consortium and has enabled the group to meet regularly for these important discussions. When HRP consortium members agree that an area of research deserves further exploration, a proposal is written and put forth for review and approval. Once approved, the fact that HHF can release the funds quickly helps to accelerate the pace of research toward a cure for hearing loss and tinnitus”.

By Peter Barr-Gillespie, Ph.D.
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