Cloning scientist Jerry Yang dies of cancer
www.chinaview.cn 2009-02-07 05:49:57 Print

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6 (Xinhua) -- China-born Xiang zhong "Jerry" Yang, one of the top cloning scientists in the world, died late Thursday in a hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, after a long battle with cancer, his secretary Phyllis Horvith confirmed to Xinhua on Friday.

The 49-year old University of Connecticut scientist died before accomplishing one of his dreams -- the cloning of a human embryo for potentially-life saving stem cells. But his achievements were highly praised by his university.

"Yang provided critical insights into the mysterious mechanisms of the technique that put University of Connecticut squarely on the frontier of science while laying the groundwork for cooperative research efforts between scientists in the United States and his native China," said a statement by the University of Connecticut.

Horvith describes Dr. Yang as "wonderful, a good man, a good boss to work for."

Born in a village called Dongcun, about 300 miles (480 kilometers) south of Beijing, China and educated at Cornell University in the United States, Yang is one of the foremost animal biotechnologists in the world. He joined the faculty of the University of Connecticut as an associate professor of animal science and head of the Biotechnology Center's Transgenic Animal Facility in 1996 and was promoted to full professor in 2000.

In 2001, he was named founding director of University of Connecticut's new Center for Regenerative Biology, overseeing five new faculty lines investigating basic science in the field of regenerative biology and medicine.

He built on his China Bridges program that promoted exchanges of professors and proposed the creation of international scientific collaboration to study cloning and other potential ways to create embryonic stem cells for use patients. Several of his students returned to China and became instrumental in jump-starting that country's nascent stem cell research efforts.

Yang was an advocate for human embryonic stem cell research. His 1999 cloning of a Holstein cow brought the University of Connecticut to national prominence. Amy was the first cloned first animal in the United States.

Embryonic stem cells are blank cells found in four- to five-day-old embryos, which have the ability to turn into any cell in the body. However, when stem cells are removed, the embryo is destroyed -- which has made this one of the most controversial medical research fields in the past decade.

U.S. Federal research funds were prohibited for embryonic stem-cell research until August 2001, when former President George W. Bush approved spending for research using only already-existing cell lines. Scientists later discovered that fewer than two dozen of those lines were useful for research, but abortion opponents opposed any legislation that would lift Bush's restrictions, and Bush twice vetoed congressional efforts to roll back his rules.

New President Barack Obama is expected to loosen the restrictions, which many researchers and advocates have complained severely set back work toward curing disease such as

Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes.

Dr. Yang's dramatic achievements include:

First scientist in the world to produce male clones from a prize Japanese breeding bull in 1988.

First to produce a cloned animal -- the famous calf, Amy -- from an adult farm animal, at University of Connecticut, in 1999.

First to report that cloned animals have telomeres of normal length, an important observation, since telomeres function as disposable buffers at the ends of chromosomes, preventing loss of genetic information that is essential to cellular function.

First to report abnormal expression of X-linked genes in cloned animals.
Editor: Mu Xuequan