Paul J. Fairchild
Editor

The Immunological Barriers to Regenerative Medicine

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Jackie, whose unswerving love, support and encouragement over the past 25 years, remains a constant source of strength and inspiration in a rapidly-changing world.
Few could doubt the need for regenerative medicine. While the increase in life expectancy we have witnessed throughout the developed world over the past 80 years is undoubtedly a medical success story of unprecedented magnitude, the accompanying increase in incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with a chronic or degenerative aetiology, represents a significant challenge of the twenty-first century. It is estimated, for instance, that the worldwide incidence of mortality due to NCDs will rise to 52 million per year by 2030, while deaths through infectious disease will continue to decline throughout the same period. Such changes in modern healthcare needs, have created an almost insatiable demand for new treatments capable of harnessing the properties of stem cells to replace diseased or effete cell types, or that rejuvenate tissues from within, through the activity of endogenous stem cells. And there have been numerous recent advances that represent significant steps towards the realisation of this vision. While the routine derivation of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) has made pluripotency accessible in man for the first time, the advent of induced pluripotency has paved the way for its clinical application to be tailored to the needs of the individual. Furthermore, preliminary successes in the treatment of diseases such as macular degeneration of the eye through cell replacement therapy suggest that we may at last be on the cusp of reaping the benefits of the past 15 years of research into the nascent field of regenerative medicine.

Nevertheless, fundamental challenges remain to be addressed before such developments may have any significant impact on global health. The British Government’s Forward look in regenerative medicine, convened in September 2011, identified the immune response directed at stem cell-derived tissues to be a fundamental roadblock to progress. Although the early days of regenerative medicine were accompanied by unfounded optimism that tissues differentiated from hESC or, more recently, induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC), might prove to be poorly immunogenic, it is now widely accepted that cell therapies pose no fewer immunological challenges than whole organ transplantation: indeed, unlike conventional transplants, the propensity for tumorigenesis of pluripotent stem
cells, suggests that long-term immune suppression is unlikely to offer a solution to rejection in this particular setting.

It is against such a backdrop that this volume offers an analysis of the scale and nature of the immunological issues facing regenerative medicine, drawing on the expertise of laboratories around the world who have taken up the challenge of applying their expertise in immunology to the vagaries of stem cell biology. In Part I, we explore the extent to which the principles of allograft rejection, learned over several decades from our experiences of whole organ transplantation, apply within the unique context of cell replacement therapy. Part II discusses various innovative ways of addressing the issues of immunogenicity, while, in Part III, we focus exclusively on the induction of immunological tolerance through a variety of novel approaches. It is our hope that this systematic analysis of the current state of the field will galvanise efforts to solve an issue which has so far remained intractable.

I am, of course, deeply indebted to all the authors for their patience and commitment to completing this project. Furthermore, there are many who have played an important part in its completion, often in subtle ways, and invariably without realising how important their contributions have been. I have, for instance, been inspired by many friends and colleagues, of which Bébhinn Ramsay, Steve Cobbold and Kathleen Nolan deserve special mention. The members of my laboratory should likewise be singled out, not only for their encouragement and the many scientific insights they have offered, but for the temporary neglect they have endured with such good humour. To this end, I would like to thank Tim Davies, Kate Silk, Alison Leishman, Naoki Ichiryu, Simon Hackett and Patty Sachamitr for their loyalty and for creating such a dynamic and enjoyable environment in which to work. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the enormous debt of gratitude I owe my mentors, past and present, for instilling in me their enthusiasm for science and its application to medicine. Jonathan Austyn, David Wraith, Richard Gardner and Herman Waldmann have all invested huge amounts of time and resources in me over the years, often with precious little reward, but their efforts have certainly not been overlooked! Finally, as is so often the case, it is my wife, Jackie, and my son, Richard, who deserve the greatest recognition for their ongoing support and unflinching love and encouragement: without their sacrifice of holidays and our usual family Christmas, this volume would never have been completed!

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Paul J. Fairchild
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Contributors

Eleanor M. Bolton Department of Surgery, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Richard Boyd Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

J. Andrew Bradley Department of Surgery, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Matthew Buckland Medical Research Council Centre for Transplantation, King’s College London, London, UK

Richard K. Burt Department of Medicine, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL, USA

You-Hong Cheng Department of Medicine, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL, USA

Ann Chidgey Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

James C. Cicciarelli Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics Laboratory, Menendez National Institute of Transplantation, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Francesco Dazzi Stem Cell Biology, Division of Experimental Medicine, Imperial College, London, UK

Karen English Cellular Immunology Group, Institute of Immunology, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Paul J. Fairchild Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Luis Graça Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Molecular Medicine, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal
Simon Hackett  Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Tracy Heng  Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

Roland W. Herzog  Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Naoki Ichiryu  Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Noriyuki Kasahara  Department of Medicine, Department of Molecular and Medical Pharmacology, David Geffen School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Ann A. Kiessling  Bedford Stem Cell Research Foundation and Harvard Medical School, Bedford, MA, USA

Cody A. Koch  Department of Otorhinolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, MN, USA

Paula W. Lampton  Department of Biology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Robert Lechler  Medical Research Council Centre for Transplantation, King’s College London, London, UK

Nathan A. Lemp  Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics Laboratory, Mendez National Institute of Transplantation, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Ge Lin  National Engineering Research Center of Human Stem Cells, Institute of Reproductive and Stem Cell Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, China

Giovanna Lombardi  Medical Research Council Centre for Transplantation, King’s College London, London, UK

Guang-Xiu Lu  National Engineering Research Center of Human Stem Cells, Institute of Reproductive and Stem Cell Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, China

Ilaria Marigo  Stem Cell Biology, Division of Experimental Medicine, Imperial College, London, UK

David M. Markusic  Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Francesca Milanetti  Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology, ‘Sapienza’ University of Rome, Rome, Italy
Bob Miyake Department of Internal Medicine and VAMC, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Iowa City, IA, USA

Jessica Morison Monash Immunology and Stem Cell Laboratories, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

Judith A. Newmark Department of Biology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Jeremy I. Pearl Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA

Jeffrey L. Platt Department of Surgery, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Ou-Yang Qi National Engineering Research Center of Human Stem Cells, Institute of Reproductive and Stem Cell Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, China

Xiao-Bing Qian National Engineering Research Center of Human Stem Cells, Institute of Reproductive and Stem Cell Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, China

Brandon K. Sack Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Lesley Smyth Medical Research Council Centre for Transplantation, King’s College London, London, UK

Kathryn J. Wood Transplantation Research Immunology Group, Nuffield Department of Surgery, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Joseph C. Wu Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA

Nicholas Zavazava Department of Internal Medicine and VAMC, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Iowa City, IA, USA