Preface

This Special Issue takes origin from the wide interest presently surrounding research about stem cells, with the fascinating implications for the treatment of human disorders through their manipulation and transfer. It was also stimulated by the success of numerous International meetings which took place in 2002 on this subject: we may recall, among others, the excellent Conference held in Paris at the Institute de France, organised by the Academie National de Medicine and the Academy of Medical Sciences of the U.K., with an introductory lecture by Prof. Jacob.

In addition, focus on stem cell potential to mediate cell replacement in injury/degeneration for future clinical applications have been a central issue in several workshops or courses related to important international congresses: for instance, still in 2002, during the 32nd International Congress on Neuroscience in Florida, a Workshop on Stem Cells for Neurological Disease emphasized the appropriate therapeutic strategies and diseases for stem cell clinical use.

The possibility of clinical treatment of stem cells in severe untreatable neurodegenerative diseases such as ALS (Amiotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) has been furthermore explored during the 12th European Neurological Society Meeting in Berlin, Germany.

On occasions like these we had the chance to contact some of the prominent scientists engaged in the study of both embryonic and adult stem cells, and we could secure their collaboration to a special publication devoted to the burning issues of stem cell enrichment, propagation and differentiation, with a special attention to ethical problems arising in this area.

Important encouragement for the present enterprise was given by Prof. Merten, of the Genethon II, Gene therapy Program of France and Managing Editor of *Cytotechnology*. We would also thank Professor Silani, of the University of Milano, for valuable advice on neurological issues.

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