Induced pluripotent stem cells: Reprogramming cellular fate for therapeutic applications.

Samer El Hayek*

Department of Psychiatry, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon.

Introduction

Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells (iPSCs) represent a groundbreaking advancement in the field of regenerative medicine, offering unprecedented opportunities for disease modeling, drug discovery, and personalized therapies. Discovered just over a decade ago, iPSCs have rapidly emerged as a powerful tool for generating patient-specific cell types without the ethical concerns associated with embryonic stem cells. In this article, we explore the remarkable journey of induced pluripotent stem cells, from their discovery to their transformative potential in biomedical research and clinical applications [1].

The birth of iPSCs

In 2006, Shinya Yamanaka and his team achieved a scientific milestone by successfully reprogramming adult mouse fibroblast cells into a pluripotent state using a combination of transcription factors [2]. This groundbreaking discovery, which earned Yamanaka the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2012, laid the foundation for the generation of induced pluripotent stem cells. Shortly afterward, similar reprogramming techniques were successfully applied to human cells, revolutionizing the field of stem cell biology [3].

Cellular reprogramming: The process of generating iPSCs involves the introduction of key transcription factors, typically Oct4, Sox2, Klf4, and c-Myc (OSKM), into somatic cells through viral vectors or other delivery methods [4]. These factors act by reprogramming the cellular epigenetic landscape, resetting the gene expression profile to a pluripotent state reminiscent of embryonic stem cells. The resulting iPSCs exhibit characteristics similar to embryonic stem cells, including the ability to differentiate into all three germ layers and form various cell types [5].

Applications in disease modeling: One of the most significant applications of iPSCs lies in disease modeling, whereby patient-specific iPSCs are differentiated into relevant cell types affected by a particular disease [6]. This approach allows researchers to recapitulate disease phenotypes in a controlled laboratory setting, providing valuable insights into disease mechanisms and enabling the development of novel therapeutic strategies. iPSC-based disease models have been established for a wide range of disorders, including neurodegenerative diseases, cardiovascular disorders, and genetic syndromes [7].

iPSC technology holds promise for revolutionizing drug discovery and toxicity screening by providing more physiologically relevant cellular models for testing potential therapeutics. Patient-derived iPSCs offer a personalized platform for evaluating drug responses and identifying patient-specific treatment approaches [8]. Additionally, iPSC-based assays can be used to assess drug toxicity and predict adverse effects, ultimately improving the safety and efficacy of pharmaceutical compounds.

Personalized regenerative therapies: One of the most anticipated applications of iPSCs is in personalized regenerative medicine, where patient-specific iPSCs are differentiated into the desired cell types for transplantation or tissue engineering. By generating autologous cell therapies tailored to individual patients, iPSCs offer the potential to overcome immune rejection and compatibility issues associated with traditional allogeneic transplantation. While significant challenges remain, including the risk of tumorigenicity and immunogenicity, ongoing research efforts aim to address these hurdles and translate iPSC-based therapies into clinical practice [9].

Challenges and future directions: Despite the tremendous promise of iPSC technology, several challenges must be addressed to realize its full potential in biomedical research and clinical applications. These challenges include improving the efficiency and safety of reprogramming techniques, optimizing differentiation protocols to generate functional cell types, and ensuring the scalability and reproducibility of iPSC-based therapies. Moreover, ethical considerations, regulatory oversight, and intellectual property rights remain important aspects to be carefully navigated as iPSC technology continues to advance [10].

Conclusion

Induced pluripotent stem cells represent a transformative tool in biomedical research and regenerative medicine, offering unprecedented opportunities for disease modeling, drug discovery, and personalized therapies. From their humble beginnings as reprogrammed somatic cells to their potential as patient-specific regenerative therapies, iPSCs continue to redefine the boundaries of stem cell science. With ongoing research and technological advancements, iPSCs hold the promise of revolutionizing healthcare by providing innovative solutions to some of the most challenging medical conditions of our time.

***Correspondence to:** Samer El Hayek**,** Department of Psychiatry, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, E-mail: Hayek@gmail.com

***Received:** 04-Feb-2024, Manuscript No. AACBM-24-130181; **Editor assigned:** 06-Feb-2024, PreQC No. AACBM-24-1301815(PQ); **Reviewed:** 20-Feb-2024, QC No AACBM-24-1301815; **Revised:** 23-Feb-2024, Manuscript No. AACBM-24-1301815(R); **Published:** 28-Feb-2024, DOI:10.35841/aacbm-6.1.190*

***Citation:** El Hayek S. Induced pluripotent stem cells: Reprogramming cellular fate for therapeutic applications. J Cell Biol Metab. 2024;6(1):190*

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Citation: *El Hayek S. Induced pluripotent stem cells: Reprogramming cellular fate for therapeutic applications. J Cell Biol Metab. 2024;6(1):190*