

Knoepfler Lab Stem Cell Blog

Building stem cell bridges

Slowly Removing the Mask of the Phantom of the Stem Cell Opera: BioGatekeeper

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The technology to change just about any human cell into a super powerful kind of stem cell called induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells or iPSC) has great potential not only to help millions of patients, but also to make companies millions or even billions of dollars.

Many scientists have been on the trail of cellular reprogramming, as this process of making powerful stem cells is called, but it was Dr. Shinya Yamanaka who finally got it to work first and the predominant intellectual property in this area so far has been the so-called “Yamanaka Patent”.

A mysterious organization called BioGatekeeper, Inc. has filed a legal challenge to the Yamanaka Patent seeking to cancel it (for more on this see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Who is BioGatekeeper?

Kyoto Exhibit 2010
BioGatekeeper v. Kyoto University
IPR2014-01286

So far the stem cell field does not know, but I’m convinced the truth will come out.

Another question is why BioGatekeeper would want to hide. The seemingly obvious answer is they want to avoid potential negative PR. However, another perhaps complimentary notion is that BioGatekeeper wants to avoid being identified because it is really a team effort, there

are several parties behind it, and frankly some of this group do not want to publicly be associated with the others.

One of the most fascinating things for me as I've been following this story is the large number of different possible people and companies that have been suggested to me by people in the know as being behind BioGatekeeper.

Even if none of these are behind BioGatekeeper (whether alone or collectively) it is intriguing that there are so many companies who might want a slice of the iPS cell pie and so might be very happy to see the Yamanaka Patent nullified.

I suppose it is also possible that BioGatekeeper chose that name not only to put on the appearance of a do-gooder, but also using some kind of reverse psychology they wanted to attract attention and get publicity via this mystery. If the latter is the case, then I guess I've fallen for their trick.

Whatever their motivations, it's also interesting how quite a few of these potential BioGatekeepers can one way or another be linked to the same law firm(s) that seem to be involved.

The cell reprogramming intellectual property arena has many players, is interconnected, and brings into play some of the say attorneys over and over.

The best current prediction is that behind the mask of BioGatekeeper, behind that temporary curtain of anonymity, are several different parties who each have a financial interest in nullifying the Yamanaka Patent. As the clues continue to pour in, the stem cell field will determine who they are and what they are up to soon enough.