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Launching a startup company in academia: The jCyte experience

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Throughout my career, I have been working on the development of a cell-based therapeutic for retinal degenerative diseases. Although unconventional and interdisciplinary, this project was long accommodated within the academic setting. However, as translational momentum continued to build, I found it necessary to confront the need for a corporate entity to carry forward aspects of the work that are not necessarily compatible with the role and organization of traditional academic institutions. Faced with this situation, one approach is to find an industrial partner. The other is to create one, which is what I did. The entity thus created, jCyte, is a virtual startup and spinoff of UC Irvine, where I continued on as faculty in ophthalmology. Despite the inherent administrative complexity, this hybrid academic-corporate arrangement has definite near-term advantages, including utilization of previously developed resources and overall expenses. Looking forward, jCyte has two paths of growth, either to develop into a stand-alone, bricks and mortar entity, or to be acquired by a pharmaceutical company with interests and experience in the eye.

Biography

Henry Klassen has completed his MD and PhD degrees at University of Pittsburgh, Residency at Yale Eye Center and Fellowship at Moorfields Eye Hospital/ Institute of Ophthalmology in London, UK. He is an Associate Professor of Ophthalmology and Director of the Stem Cell & Retinal Regeneration Program at University of California, Irvine. He is also the Founder of jCyte, a startup company formed to commercialize retinal progenitor cell-based technology for use in retinal conditions.

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