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“With the Biocell Centre, we are already in the future”

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An important Italian research centre opened in the United States. It will preserve stem cells taken from amniotic fluid. It is the new frontier in life sciences, and it will give hope in the treatment of many diseases. On Thursday, it was the turn of **Deval Patrick**, the Massachusetts Governor, to have a preview. On Saturday, Boston’s Biocell Centre was officially opened, with a series of initiatives, in the presence of the Italian press. This research centre, which was created in **Busto Arsizio**, is now also present in the international heart of innovation: the United States. We are not used to this sort of news; all too often, we hear of brain drains in relation to Italian scientific research, not “invasions”. But for once, this is not the case. **Biocell is the first centre in America** in which stem cells are taken from the amniotic fluid and then cryopreserved, and it was designed in Italy.

The headquarters of the facility extend over about 400 m2, on a single floor. In addition to a variety of activities, here, stem cells will be collected from amniotic fluid, and then preserved. These cells will be able to help children, when they become adults, **with some types of genetic treatments**. Today is a day of great satisfaction and pride for the Scientific Director of the Biocell Centre, Professor **Giuseppe Simoni**, a former lecturer in Genetics at The University of Milan, who, since 1969, has devoted himself to research on amniotic cells and whose cryopreservation method, has now also reached the United States. Professor Simoni said, “For many years, **I have looked at and closely studied the amniotic fluid**. I could say that I have spent a lifetime trying to discover everything I can about this type of foetal material. For obvious reasons, as I was responsible for prenatal diagnosis, I was “forced” to preserve part of the amniotic fluid used for amniocentesis, just in case tests had to be repeated. So, I came to defrost liquid samples, and then to refreeze them again. Until I realized that their characteristics didn’t change in the slightest after these steps. I then had a flash of inspiration: why not preserve them in liquid nitrogen and use them again, if necessary?”

The **Biocell Centre Corporation** has set a real scientific challenge, a bet that the biological inheritance of every future mother will soon have practical applications. On this matter, it is clear that the intention of the new centre is to start up research and collaboration projects with US universities and hospitals. One example is the research agreement on cell therapy for retinal degeneration using stem cells extracted from amniotic fluid, reached between the Biocell Centre and the **Harvard Medical School Ophthalmology Department**. With decades of experience in managing US science-based industries, Doctor Kate Torchilin explains, “We are confident that the Biocell Centre Corporation’s idea will be met favourably by the American people, who have always been open to anything new, and to challenges, creating a perfect synergy, where the choice of every mother to consider her child’s health, will also help to make progresses in scientific research, for everyone’s sake. What future mother, hoping

that her child will be born healthy, and will stay such as long as possible, would say no to stipulating a sort of “biological insurance policy”, by preserving stem cells extracted from the amniotic fluid? I believe none would, especially as such an action entails no harm either to her, or to her unborn child”.

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