

On Human Gene Editing: International Summit Statement

Organizing Committee for the International Summit on Human Gene Editing

December 3, 2015

After three days of thoughtful discussion of these issues, the members of the Organizing Committee for the International Summit on Human Gene Editing have reached the following conclusions:

1. Basic and Preclinical Research. Intensive basic and preclinical research is clearly needed and should proceed, subject to appropriate legal and ethical rules and oversight, on (i) technologies for editing genetic sequences in human cells, (ii) the potential benefits and risks of proposed clinical uses, and (iii) understanding the biology of human embryos and germline cells. If, in the process of research, early human embryos or germline cells undergo gene editing, the modified cells should not be used to establish a pregnancy.

2. Clinical Use: Somatic. Many promising and valuable clinical applications of gene editing are directed at altering genetic sequences only in somatic cells – that is, cells whose genomes are not transmitted to the next generation. Examples that have been proposed include editing genes for sickle-cell anemia in blood cells or for improving the ability of immune cells to target cancer. There is a need to understand the risks, such as inaccurate editing, and the potential benefits of each proposed genetic modification. Because proposed clinical uses are intended to affect only the individual who receives them, they can be appropriately and rigorously evaluated within existing and evolving regulatory frameworks for gene therapy, and regulators can weigh risks and potential benefits in approving clinical trials and therapies.

3. Clinical Use: Germline. It would be irresponsible to proceed with any clinical use of germline editing unless and until (i) the relevant safety and efficacy issues have been resolved, based on appropriate understanding and balancing of risks, potential benefits, and alternatives, and (ii) there is broad societal consensus about the appropriateness of the proposed application. Moreover, any clinical use should proceed only under appropriate regulatory oversight. At present, these criteria have not been met for any proposed clinical use: the safety issues have not yet been adequately explored; the cases of most compelling benefit are limited; and many nations have legislative or regulatory bans on germline modification. However, as scientific knowledge advances and societal views evolve, the clinical use of germline editing should be revisited on a regular basis.

4. Need for an Ongoing Forum. While each nation ultimately has the authority to regulate activities under its jurisdiction, the human genome is shared among all nations. The international community should strive to establish norms concerning acceptable uses of human germline editing and to harmonize regulations, in order to discourage unacceptable activities while advancing human health and welfare.

We therefore call upon the national academies that co-hosted the summit – the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and U.S. National Academy of Medicine; the Royal Society; and the Chinese Academy of Sciences – to take the lead in creating an ongoing international forum to discuss potential clinical uses of gene editing; help inform decisions by national policymakers and others; formulate recommendations and guidelines; and promote coordination among nations.