

# Spanish minister inks stem-cell research with S'pore

DR BERNAT Soria peers at the microscope and flips through the logbook at the National University of Singapore (NUS) laboratory where he had studied stem cells for over four years.

From 2002 to 2006, the diabetes and stem cell expert was a visiting professor there.

Now, he is Spain's Health Minister, in Singapore this week on an official visit.

Yesterday, he sealed an official collaboration between Spanish and Singapore labs, to search for a stem-cell treatment for diabetes.

Diabetes affects about 200 million people worldwide, and many diabetes patients require kidney dialysis.

"Anything we can do to help diabetes patients is relevant for their health, the wellness of the country and the sustainability of health-care systems," Dr Soria said.

Details of the scheme are still being worked out.

Dr Soria, 57, said he opted to do his research here as the research environment in Spain was too restrictive then - he could not work with embryonic stem cells, the master cells, which can become any cell in the body.

This year, one of the projects he started has borne fruit - the lab has inserted the genes needed to make insulin into adult stem cells.

During his five-day visit here, he will meet Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan to discuss biomedical research. He will also visit the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*Star), the Singapore General Hospital and other institutions.

Today, he will be giving a lecture on the Spanish national health system at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Dr Soria also conferred the Plaque of the Health Civil Order, the highest Spanish civil distinction, on Mr Khaw and Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang, for their roles in promoting health and biomedical research.