

Stem Cell Research - Needless death

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Politicians who believe a particular “cause” will increase their odds in a voting booth can often be heard (loudly) beating the drum for that cause on the campaign trail. If a public poll appears to indicate that Americans are in favor of something—a check of the wind, so-to-speak—many politicians adopt that cause with gusto. But occasionally, it would be nice if the politicians would check the facts rather than checking the wind and popular opinion. Americans would be better informed and better served if those nominated for office would educate themselves on the facts.

For instance, embryonic stem cell research has been a political hot button for several years. Many elected officials and celebrities take pleasure in locking arms together and demanding that the government fund embryonic stem cell research. To hear their rhetoric, one might believe that these cells harvested from human embryos could not only cure Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease, but also give us peace on Earth and resolve gridlock on the nation’s interstates. Surely the average person can see through this political grandstanding. [One wonders how much money the abortion lobbyists have funneled into this debate to keep the issue in the headlines.]

In reality, we know today that those embryonic stem cells are totally unnecessary. Stem cell research can continue without the destruction of innocent embryos. Adult stem cells provide the answer. Initially, the controversy was allegedly whether or not the stem cells were “pluripotent”—meaning cells that have the ability to become almost any cell in the body. These special cells can become healthy heart tissue or nervous tissue which could potentially be used to treat congestive heart failure or various brain disorders respectively. Currently stem cells are collected from four different sources: adult tissue, umbilical cords, aborted fetuses, and leftover embryos stored from *in vitro* fertilization procedures. The real controversy surrounds where the stem cells are collected from.

Prior to 2001, it was believed that only embryonic stem cells—that is, cells collected from aborted fetuses or embryos—were pluripotent. However, in the past six years, several peer-reviewed research studies have clearly shown that **adult** stem cells are also pluripotent. In fact, in January 2007 researchers demonstrated they could derive human stem cells from the amniotic fluid surrounding babies in the womb. Adult stem cells collected from this method would potentially provide an endless source of stem cells that are easily available for research. According to *USA Today* staff writer Elizabeth Weise, “The researchers at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., were able to get the amniotic cells to differentiate into fat, bone, muscle, blood, nerve and liver cells.” **Simply put, we do not need embryonic stem cells.** The current “score” is 72 to 0—meaning there are currently seventy-two conditions successfully being treated using **adult** stem cells (see <http://www.stemcellresearch.org/facts/treatments.htm>), whereas embryonic stem cells have still yet to show any benefit in treating human conditions.

Dr. Mae-Wan Ho wrote a paper comparing the “score” between embryonic (ES) and adult stem cells. After reviewing studies employing embryonic stem cells she concluded: “These latest results show that the ES cells need to be genetically modified and extensive manipulation *in vitro* before they can be transplanted safely. Direct transplant of ES cells are known to give rise to teratomas (tumors—BH) and uncontrollable cell proliferation. There is already evidence that ES cells are genetically unstable in long term culture, and are especially prone to chromosomal abnormalities.” This is not exactly the scorecard that the media has been presenting the general public.

The American people should be bold enough to hold politicians and the mainstream media accountable: “Why promote embryonic stem cells if the adult stem cells work?” Why do individuals continue to promote the “potential” benefit of embryonic stem cells when it has been unmistakably shown that adult stem cells are working better? What does this tell us about the value our society is placing on human life? Have we forgotten that the first step toward the Nazi Holocaust was when physicians began to selectively determine which lives were worth living? Much of the moral

decay we are witnessing today is a direct result of society in which human life is no longer valued.

Robert Reily observed: “The problem is that, by denying the possibility of a relationship between God and man, atheism also denies the possibility of a just relationship between men.... Human life is sacred only if there is a God to sanctify it. Otherwise man is just another collection of atoms and can be treated as such” (1988). Children (and adults) need to be taught that life is precious, and reminded that God views life to begin before birth (see Isaiah 49: 1,5; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-14; Job 3:13-16, etc.). Otherwise, without intervention, society will continue to treat humans as simply a collection of atoms—and we will continue to watch the onslaught of needless deaths.

For a more detailed review of the stem cell controversy please see the January 2006 issue of *Think* available online.