

Pro-Life Wisconsin



Defending them all...

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Embryo Destruction Bill Advances the Culture of Death

By Matt Sande, Deputy State Director, Pro-Life Wisconsin

As the first session of the 110th Congress opened earlier this month, the new Democratic majority made the federal funding of embryo destructive research a top legislative priority. By the time of this writing, we expect that the U.S. House of Representatives will have passed a bill in their first “100 hours” that would federally fund the destruction of human embryos for stem cell research.

Regrettably, this is *deja vu* all over again. Last year the House and Senate shamefully disregarded the right to life of innocent human beings by passing the same deadly measure that would effectively rescind President Bush’s federal funding restrictions on human embryonic stem cell research. Under enormous pressure, President Bush courageously vetoed House Resolution 810 stating that if the bill became law, “American taxpayers would, for the first time in our history, be compelled to fund the deliberate destruction of human embryos. And I’m not going to allow it. I have made it clear to Congress that I will not allow our nation to cross this moral line.” The House’s effort to override his veto fell 51 votes short of the required two-thirds majority.

Reintroduced as 2007 House Resolution (HR) 3, the *Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act* would allow federal funding of *new* embryonic stem cell lines derived from the destruction of *new* human embryos “donated” from in vitro fertilization clinics. President Bush’s embryonic stem cell executive order of August 2001 restricted federal research grants to the approximately seventy-eight existing human embryonic stem cell lines and prohibited federal funding of any new lines. In effect, the President said NO to federal funding of the destruction of new human embryos. Although Pro-Life Wisconsin opposed this decision, stressing that federal funding of *any and all (past and future)* lines should be forbidden, we have nevertheless been very concerned about the concerted effort in Congress to fully lift the current Bush restrictions. Despite the Democratic takeover of Congress it will be very difficult to override an anticipated presidential veto of HR 3, especially in the House.

Proponents of human embryonic stem cell research conveniently ignore two critical truths: **1) a human embryo is a human being from the moment of fertilization; and 2) adult stem cell research is the only stem cell research with proven clinical application.** The moral and medical implications of these two truths must be considered if we are to move forward and truly save lives.

First, human embryologists authoritatively conclude that a human embryo is a human being immediately beginning at fertilization – the fusion of an egg and sperm immediately resulting in a new, genetically distinct human being. At no other logical or scientifically sound point can we say that a human life begins. The embryo is not some pre-human cellular glob without purpose or plan. Embryologists categorically reject the notion of a “pre-embryo” or some form of evolving “human-being-on-the-way.” From its conception, an embryo contains the entire genetic makeup of a human being. When an embryo’s inner stem cell mass is extracted to harvest its stem cells, it is necessarily killed. Accordingly, embryonic stem cell research should be properly termed embryo destructive research.

Second, it is in the area of adult stem cell research that we are seeing documented clinical success over a wide range of health conditions: breast cancer, ovarian cancer, brain tumors, stroke, juvenile diabetes, spinal cord injury, cardiac repair after heart attack, and corneal damage to name a few. Adult-type stem cells derived from somatic (body) cells as well as from umbilical cord blood and placentas are saving lives now. This successful research poses no ethical problems whatsoever.

Ethically unproblematic, clinically proven cord blood stem cells are adult-type stem cells that have been used to treat many life-threatening diseases. Over sixty medical conditions can be treated with cord blood. They include certain types of leukemia, disorders such as Hodgkin's disease and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, multiple myeloma, breast cancer and sickle-cell anemia. Cord blood is especially powerful in treating sickle cell anemia, a painful blood condition damaging organs and tissues caused by abnormally shaped blood cells.

A South Korean woman paralyzed for twenty years is now walking again after scientists repaired her damaged spine using stem cells derived from umbilical cord blood. Thirty-seven-year-old Hwang Mi-Soon told the media she considered her ability to walk nothing short of a miracle. "I never dreamed of getting to my feet again," she said. Another remarkable success story is Adam Susser of Florida, a child with cerebral palsy who was cortically blind and could not speak prior to receiving umbilical cord stem cell therapy. He can now both see and speak.

Adult stem cell research is the *only* stem cell research with proven clinical application. In contrast, embryonic stem cells have *never* helped a human patient and any claim that they may do so is pure speculation. If an embryo is just a glob of cells, and if progress in adult stem cell research is a myth, then human embryonic stem cell research is morally licit and medically sound. But if the opposite is true, and medical science tells us that it is, then embryonic stem cell research is imperiling innocent human lives and impeding medical progress.

Back in Wisconsin, the UW-Madison has become a leading center for research where human embryos – babies in the earliest stages of development – are destroyed to harvest their body parts, namely their stem cells. Not only does the UW engage in this lethal research, it has vigorously lobbied at the federal level to force taxpayers to fund it. Some argue that the children being used in this research at UW-Madison are unwanted and will be discarded anyway. But we do not experiment upon the elderly or harvest the organs of death row prisoners because they will "die soon anyway." **There are ethical lines that civilized societies must never cross. Killing babies for their stem cells is such a line.**

Working to maintain Wisconsin's position as the epicenter of human embryonic stem cell research, Governor Doyle in 2005 introduced and signed a \$750 million budget initiative that included a new \$375 million research institute – called the *Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery* – on the UW Madison campus. Although much of the Governor's funding initiative involves ethical, life-saving research, there is a portion – human embryonic stem cell research – that focuses on the destruction of innocent human life for the perceived benefit of others. Collaboration among UW scientists in state of the art laboratories must only include ethical research.

Importantly, we must not let the discussion shift away from questioning the morality of human embryonic stem cell research to debating how best to economically compete with California and other states and nations that are heavily investing in it. Wisconsin must not participate in trading human lives for financial gain and recognition. In the long run, our state will become morally bankrupt.

The pro-life community IS pro stem cell research. We want to see research progress toward the treatment of debilitating diseases, but not by killing life in order to potentially save it. Ethical and effective adult stem cell research is a life-saving alternative. Americans deserve the assurance that their country can be both a leader in biotechnology and bioethics.