

Catholic Teaching on Stem Cell Research

Part II: Myths and Facts of Stem Cell Research

- In 2007 the N.C. State Legislature and U.S. Congress will consider whether to fund the destruction of human embryos for embryonic stem cell research using tax dollars.
- As Catholics, we have a "duty to condemn the particular gravity of the voluntary destruction of human embryos obtained 'in vitro' for the sole purpose of research..." *Donum Vitae* (The Gift of Life) I, 5 (1987)
- This second of three bulletin inserts continues the discussion of the science and morality of stem cell research by dispelling some myths and emphasizing some facts.

MYTHS:

- 1) **Stem cells can only come from embryos.** FALSE. Adult stem cells can come morally from adult tissues like bone marrow, fat, and skin, from afterbirth tissues like the placenta and umbilical cord, and from tissues from miscarriages.
- 2) **The Church is opposed to stem cell research.** FALSE. The Church encourages all adult stem cell research when the donors have given informed consent.
- 3) **Embryonic stem cell research is necessary.** FALSE. No human being has been helped by embryonic stem cells.
- 4) **Adult stem cells are not good enough.** FALSE. Thousands of people have been cured with morally acquired adult stem cells. The best successes are with bone marrow stem cell transplants and umbilical cord blood transplants. Well over 70 human diseases have already been treated with adult stem cells, with over 1000 more U.S. trials approved.
- 5) **All excess embryos in fertility clinics will be thrown away.** FALSE. Parents often change their minds and choose to implant their embryos or place them for adoption with other couples.
- 6) **The embryos already in fertility clinics are all that scientists want.** FALSE. Scientists want to generate new embryos by many different methods, including cloning.
- 7) **Embryonic stem cell research is against the law.** FALSE. There are no U.S. or N.C. laws or regulations against destroying human embryos for research purposes.
- 8) **There is no embryonic stem cell research in NC.** FALSE. Researchers at UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University and other public and private institutions already perform human embryonic stem cell research and/or publicly lobby to increase federal and state funding to destroy more human embryos for research.

FACTS:

- 1) **Human life begins with an embryo.** Every person started as a single special cell, which grew into an embryo, then a fetus, and then was born.
- 2) **All human embryos are human beings.** Whether the embryo is conceived normally inside her mother, in a Petri dish through fertilization of an egg by a sperm, or by cloning, she is still a human being.
- 3) **Creating human embryos outside of the marital conjugal act is immoral.** Church teaching is very clear that artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization (IVF), freezing embryos, pre-implantation diagnosis, and other reproductive technologies are contrary to God's design for procreation and therefore immoral.
- 4) **Cloning produces an embryo.** Regardless of the method, all forms of cloning produce an embryo that must be destroyed to get embryonic stem cells.
- 5) **Somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) is one type of cloning.** SCNT results in an embryo. This is how Dolly the sheep was conceived.
- 6) **Embryonic stem cells have serious disadvantages.** Embryonic stem cells tend to form life-threatening tumors in recipients. Embryonic stem cells have dangerous genetic instability that gets worse over time. Embryonic stem cells from fertility clinic embryos would require dangerous immune suppression if transplanted.
- 7) **You are already funding human embryonic stem cell research.** Beginning in 2001 for the first time in US history, President Bush and Congress have authorized approximately \$100 million for human embryonic stem cell research with your tax dollars.
- 8) **Millions of human eggs will be needed for embryonic stem cell treatments.** Because of the poor rate of acquiring embryonic stem cells from embryos, problems with tumor formation, and the need for matching tissues because of immune rejection, there are not nearly enough human eggs safely available.
- 9) **Human egg donation is painful, dangerous, and potentially deadly.** To get enough eggs for research, significant financial incentives are offered to young women. This disproportionately affects poor and/or disadvantaged women. Eggs are harvested surgically after a woman is given a drug to super-ovulate. There are many serious physical side effects including a risk of death.

What can I do about this issue?

- To contact your legislators by email or phone start here:
Website: www.ncga.state.nc.us/GIS/Representation/
Phone for the State Board of Elections: (919) 733-7173
(They will connect you to your County Board of Elections who will tell you exactly who represents you and how to contact them.)

Look for Part III of this Catholic education series in next week's bulletin.