



DO NO HARM
The Coalition of Americans
for Research Ethics

FOUNDING MEMBERS

Kevin Fitzgerald, S.J., Ph.D.
Research Associate,
Division of Hematology and Oncology
Loyola University Medical Center

C. Christopher Hook, M.D.
Hematology/Medical Oncology,
The Mayo Clinic (MN);
Chair, Mayo Clinical Ethics Council,
Mayo Reproductive Medicine Advisory
Board and DNA Research Committee

Ralph Miech, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor (Emeritus)
of Pharmacology
Brown University School of Medicine

Robert D. Orr, M.D.
Director of Ethics, FAHC
University of Vermont
College of Medicine

Edmund Pellegrino, M.D.
Center for Clinical Bioethics
Georgetown University Medical Center

David Prentice, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow for Life Sciences
Family Research Council
Center for Clinical Ethics
Georgetown University

Frank E. Young, M.D., Ph.D.
Former Commissioner,
U.S. Food and Drug Administration;
Dean Emeritus,
School of Medicine and Dentistry,
University of Rochester;
Director, Reformed Theological
Seminary, Metro Washington

Joseph Zanga, M.D.
Chairman,
Department of Pediatrics
Loyola University Medical Center

1100 H Street, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
PH: 202-347-6840
Fax: 202-347-6849
www.stemcellresearch.org

“As to diseases, make a habit of two things —
to help, or at least *do no harm*.”

— Hippocrates, *The Epidemics* —

**THE “POLITICAL SCIENCE” OF STEM CELLS
LESSON 4: THE MYTH OF THE 400,000 EMBRYOS**

Congress may vote soon on whether to divert taxpayer dollars toward stem cell research that requires destroying live human embryos. In the campaign to promote such funding, political hype has often substituted for the scientific facts. This series will help members of Congress distinguish mere politics from science.

POLITICAL:

“There are estimated to be more than 400,000 IVF embryos, which are currently frozen and will likely be destroyed if not donated, with informed consent of the couple, for research.”

- Letter from over 200 House members to President Bush, April 28, 2004, at www.house.gov/shays/news/2004/april/aprstem.htm

SCIENCE:

From the research study that provided the estimate of 400,000 frozen embryos in the U.S.:

“Patients have designated only 2.8 percent (about 11,000 embryos) for research. The vast majority of frozen embryos are designated for future attempts at pregnancy.

“From those embryos designated for research, perhaps as many as 275 stem cell lines (cell cultures suitable for further development) could be created. The actual number is likely to be much lower.”

- The RAND Law and Health Initiative, “How Many Frozen Human Embryos Are Available for Research?” (2003), at www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9038/

In short, over 200 House members based their support for the expanded destruction of human embryos on a factual claim that is 97% false.

The frozen embryos potentially available for research are enough for current laboratory research and animal trials – but then, so are the cell samples available under the Bush policy (many of which have not been turned into ongoing cell lines because they are not yet needed). **Treatment of any major human disease**, however, would require projects in human cloning, or the creation and destruction of vast numbers of **new** embryos carefully chosen to match the genetic diversity of the population. The myth of the 400,000 embryos is used to mask the fact that the campaign for “spare” embryos is useless in and of itself, and is only a transitional step to a broader agenda.

For more information to help distinguish politics from science on stem cell research, see our web site at www.stemcellresearch.org.

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