



**DO NO
HARM**

The Coalition of Americans
for Research Ethics

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“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 2: REMEMBER NOT TO TELL FAIRY TALES ABOUT ALZHEIMER’S

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:

“This issue is especially poignant given President Reagan’s passing. Embryonic stem cell research might hold the key to a cure for Alzheimer’s and other terrible diseases.”

- News release from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, June 7, 2004, <http://feinstein.senate.gov/04Releases/r-stemcell-ltr.htm>

SCIENCE:

“[T]he infrequently voiced reality, stem cell experts confess, is that, of all the diseases that may someday be cured by embryonic stem cell treatments, Alzheimer’s is among the least likely to benefit....

“[G]iven the lack of any serious suggestion that stem cells themselves have practical potential to treat Alzheimer’s, the Reagan-inspired tidal wave of enthusiasm stands as an example of how easily a modest line of scientific inquiry can grow in the public mind to mythological proportions.

“It is a distortion that some admit is not being aggressively corrected by scientists.

“‘To start with, people need a fairy tale,’ said Ronald D.G. McKay, a stem cell researcher at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. ‘Maybe that’s unfair, but they need a story line that’s relatively simple to understand.’”

- Rick Weiss, “Stem Cells An Unlikely Therapy for Alzheimer’s,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2004, p. A3

In light of the scientific realities, a central claim in the campaign for embryonic stem cell research seems to be myth, fairy tales and distortion. Don’t patients deserve better?

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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