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# **Continue ban on embryo-destructive research**

## **Doctors group shift reflects changes in stem cell research**

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Michigan citizens and leaders should be wary of the campaign seeking to reverse current law on research destroying human embryos.

Since 1978, our state has prohibited such research. A concerted effort is under way to convince Michiganders to reverse this law, in the name of potential disease cures. Their actions speak to profit motivation, patent procurement and professional advancement rather than genuine interest in the common good.

The Michigan State Medical Society recently changed its position on human embryo destructive research. This was not an anti-research decision. A consensus position was adopted by the delegates reflecting respect for human life, which begins at conception.

The resolution was improved by plans to hold educational forums on stem cell research. Increasing awareness of stem cell science will educate Michigan citizens of the potential benefits of non-embryonic stem cell research and the unjust nature of human embryonic stem cell research.

Even Dr. James Thomson, stem cell research innovator, stated "If human embryonic stem cell research does not make you at least a little bit uncomfortable, you have not thought about it enough." Those who seek to allow destructive research on human embryos, should reflect more.

President Clinton's bioethics commission in 1999 described this research as "morally problematic," but decried the lack of alternatives. Such alternatives now exist.

Recent scientific advances, particularly reprogramming of adult cells into becoming potentially helpful pluripotential stem cells, avoids ethically compromised research that harms human embryos.

Adult cells can be reprogrammed, or induced, to become pluripotential cells (iPSC). Human embryos are not destroyed. Eggs are not obtained from young women. Immunologic rejection is avoided, because the pluripotential cells are a genetic match.

Thomson describes the iPSC as "functionally equivalent" to embryonic cell lines.

Even Ian Wilmut, the scientific father of the cloned sheep Dolly, has foregone cloning in favor of research with iPSC.

The certainty of objectionable human embryo destruction supersedes theoretically beneficial research opportunities and arguments purporting economic benefit for Michigan.

And current law does allow for stem cell research. A University of Michigan "Michigan Center for Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research" Web site boasts of 40 scientists, and untold graduate and undergraduate students, presently at work doing stem cell research.

Francis Collins, former University of Michigan geneticist and the leader of the human genome project, writes, "It would be mistake to simply leave these decisions to the scientists. ... Their moral sense is, in general, no more or less well-developed than that of other groups, and they are unavoidably afflicted by potential conflict of interest that may cause them to resent boundaries set by nonscientists."

It is curious those upset with MSMS policy change would complain about the political process. At the same time they cite politicians to define ethical behavior.

It is appropriate for Michiganders to publicly discuss this contentious ethical issue. Scientists have been wrong in the past with unethical experiments. Michigan citizens who respect human life will refuse to sign, support, or vote for an agenda putting profits, patents, and self promotion before the common good.