

“Lies, Gross Distortions, and Shameless Research Frauds”

BY James Kelly

Editor’s note. Bioethicist Wesley Smith describes his friend James Kelly thusly. Kelly “is solidly against ESCR [embryonic stem cell research] and human cloning. Years ago he was in a terrible automobile accident that left him paralyzed—and he has devoted himself ever since to seeking a method of treatment that will help him walk again. He once supported ESCR, and even wrote President Bush urging full federal funding.

“But the more he researched the issue, the more he came to believe that ESCR may be more hype than hope. He soon ‘changed sides’ as it were and now argues that money invested in ESCR is that much less money available for the non-embryonic areas of research where he believes his best chances of effective treatment are to be found.”

The following is excerpted from a brilliant overview that ran in Human Events. It is as good a summary of why adult stem cells have shown enormous promise in ameliorating diseases and why stem cells from human embryos haven’t—and won’t—as you will get. It is reprinted with permission.

Adult stem cells play key roles in human organ repair and cell replacement. Embryonic stem cells are designed to function in the embryo—not in adult (postnatal) tissues. These conflicting designs present daunting obstacles to embryonic stem cells providing practical medical solutions, whereas broad medical potentials using adult stem cells and cord blood can be tapped with far less time and public expense.

Biological roadblocks to embryonic stem cells offering medical solutions include genetic instability when matured in a petri dish, unreliable cell performance, a tendency to form tumors when implanted in adults, chromosome defects when cultured extensively, and rejection. If cloning is needed to overcome rejection, the already long odds against these cells returning benefits equal to their colossal research costs grow exponentially longer.

Yet, science and industry claim the right to gamble with American lives and public resources to pursue speculative benefits at very long odds—benefits that can be more readily gained by working with nature’s design for organ repair, adult stem cells and cord blood. This by itself leads me to believe that the President’s ‘stem cells’ policy is exactly in line with America’s best medical interest. The following makes me sure of it:

The aforementioned roadblocks are safety issues that cannot be ignored. Therefore the public can’t simply place a small bet on embryonic stem cells to cover all bases. To develop embryonic stem cells for broad medical uses, nature demands that we place the greatest portion of our stem cells investment on the option with the least chance of success and the longest road to travel. If the long shot eventually does pay off, uncounted millions will suffer or die while waiting.

Social Helter Skelter

The public was initially told that embryonic stem cells would produce “miracle” cell-based cures. Scientists now admit this is unlikely. Instead we’re told that embryonic stem cells produced through cloning might produce “disease models” for studying genetic diseases and human cells for testing drugs. However, these “promises” may be equally false.

Vast differences in genetic programming, cell membrane receptors, and cell environments between embryonic and adult cells make it highly unlikely that studying defects in embryos will lead to effective treatments in adults—it’s like expecting a defective Apple computer that’s running one program to reveal how to fix a defective IBM that’s running another. Moreover, drug companies test drugs on tissues and cells as close as possible to those of adult humans for good reasons: Embryonic tissues lack the cell membrane receptors and genetic expression needed to make test results relevant to adults.

The only aspect of embryonic stem cell and human cloning hype that’s likely to be true concerns their potential for financial rewards. However, the public was led down this primrose path for “treatments and cures,” not economic growth. Plus, unspoken in this economic “promise” is the monstrous reality that countless millions will suffer horribly so that a relative few might financially prosper.

For the past five years the media and science have used lies, gross distortions, and shameless research frauds to mislead the nation regarding serious matters of public health. While tens of millions suffer for lack of effective treatments, the public is encouraged to invest billions of dollars not in practical paths to treatments or cures, but to buy penny “embryonic” research stocks that offer little foreseeable clinical worth. Should we be surprised that those promoting this agenda demand that ethics should have no place in politics or science?

Hard-Earned Lessons

Countless lives hang in the balance over the course of science, including those needing treatments now and those who will need them in the future—all are being exploited both for financial gain and as pawns in a social war.