



## *Pro-Life Activities*

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Please use this revised edition, as the embryonic stem-cell research ban has been reversed through President Obama's Executive Order.

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### **LIFE ISSUES FORUM**

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For Immediate Release**

#### **Science's Rightful Place By Richard M. Doerflinger**

Though tempered by sober realism, President Obama's inaugural address in January delivered a message of hope – including a hope that science will help our nation solve its serious problems. “We will restore science to its rightful place,” he said, “and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its costs.”

**But now** the President has decided to force U.S. taxpayers to subsidize research that requires destroying live human embryos. That decision actually ignores his pledge to take science seriously -- because science is moving on, and embryonic stem cells are becoming “obsolete.”

That's the considered judgment of the first female director of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Bernadine Healy, writing in the March 4 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. Dr. Healy cites a recent study in Israel, showing the formation of multiple tumors in a boy's nervous system after he was treated with derivatives from early fetal stem cells.

In January, a study in *Nature Biotechnology* confirmed that embryonic stem cell cultures generally contain abnormal cells that can cause cancer – and there is no simple way to tell which cells are abnormal, as they have a normal genome and may seem to be the healthiest and most viable cells. Dr. Martin Pera, stem cell expert at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, comments: “Ultimately it may be difficult or impossible to rule out with certainty that a given culture is totally free of abnormal cells.” How reassuring for those needing therapies!

Producing genetically tailored embryonic stem cells that cannot be rejected as “foreign” by a patient’s body also remains a challenge. To solve this problem, teams around the world have tried to obtain usable stem cells from cloned human embryos, but failed. Cloning also requires a huge supply of women’s eggs – and according to the February 1 issue of the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, the drugs needed to stimulate women’s ovaries to produce these eggs boosts the women’s risk of, yes, cancer. The bizarre approach of using eggs from animals instead was approved last year in Great Britain, but scientists now find that animal eggs (big surprise) do not program a human genome properly.

That’s the sobering reality. Here’s the hope. Adult stem cells, obtained without harming the donor, are benefiting more and more real patients, reversing the symptoms of multiple sclerosis and Parkinson’s disease in the latest published trials.

An advance hailed by the journal *Science* as the top scientific breakthrough of last year – a technique for reprogramming ordinary adult cells into “induced pluripotent stem cells” – looks better with each passing month. These “induced” cells can be an exact genetic match to any patient, and the journal *Nature* just published two studies showing that initial concerns about the safety of the procedure are being resolved. If there is any research

purpose for which embryonic stem cells have an advantage, these reprogrammed cells seem able to perform that task as well or better, without ethical problems.

Science and ethics are pointing the way forward together. The only thing standing in the way now is an ideology favoring embryo destruction – an ideology that is reflected in the President’s new executive order, but that the American people do not support.

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Mr. Doerflinger is Associate Director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Go to [www.usccb.org/prolife](http://www.usccb.org/prolife) to learn more about the bishops’ pro-life activities.

USCCB Pro-Life Secretariat

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