

COMMENTARY

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Mary Claire Kendall

Myths about Obama's stem cell decision

President Barack Obama's executive order signed Monday to great fanfare amid hopes of cures to come does not usher in a new era of stem-cell discovery. Nor does it represent, in Obama's words, a restoration of "commitment" to the "soundest science."

The biggest lie is that President George W. Bush's action on embryonic stem-cell research somehow limited all stem cell research. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A moral imperative compels the vigorous pursuit of stem-cell research given its tremendous therapeutic benefits. Accordingly, this research was, in fact, aggressively pursued throughout the Bush administration, yielding impressive cures or progress toward cures for a wide array of diseases.

On Aug. 9, 2001, Bush announced a new policy approving federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research

using 21 lines that private research labs had already developed.

This presidential decision liberalized federal embryonic stem-cell policy, governed by the Dickey Amendment during the Clinton administration, which banned all federal funding of this research.

Some suggest Dickey only banned the use of federal funds to destroy human embryos — not the actual research. Bush drew a clear line so that federal funds would not in any way facilitate destruction of human embryos, while allowing federally funded embryonic stem-cell research to proceed.

Yet, embryonic stem-cell research, even with this liberalized policy, has yielded exactly zero cures. And, it's not for want of trying. The fact is embryonic stem-cells commonly cause tumors in the animals in which they are injected. And, scientists, who support this research, are still warning that any

potential cures are years away.

Stem-cell research of the only clinically effective variety involves adult stem cells, and already shows great therapeutic promise. Damaged heart vessels in a patient in Germany have been healed with the help of hip-bone stem cells.

A patient with Krabbe's leukodystrophy (an enzyme disorder) was able to begin producing the necessary enzymes thanks to umbilical cord stem cells. And, a mother who was diagnosed with leukemia while pregnant and who was given six months to live, was able to use her daughter's umbilical cord stem cells to cure her leukemia.

Other ethical sources of stem cells, provided informed consent is present, include embryonic germ cells obtained from miscarriage, adult stem cells obtained from placenta and amniotic fluid, fat from liposuction, nasal epithelia, and even cadavers.

Thus, the notion that Obama conveyed in lifting the Bush embryonic restrictions that science will at long last have "integrity" — based on "facts, not ideology" — and unfettered access to the fountain of youth, is false.

Like his misguided economic stimulus bill, this latest Obama boondoggle will waste tax dollars and falsely raise hopes chasing misguided solutions. To wit, \$8.2 billion in stimulus funds is tagged for the National Institutes of Health and it's guaranteed embryonic stem cell grants will crowd out other more promising stem-cell research.

Even more, it encourages the trampling of human life at its inception. Though smaller than the period at the end of this sentence, the embryo is where we all begin. In the words of the Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D., a priest, neuroscientist, and bioethicist:

"To kill human embryos for



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A scientist looks at a colony of human embryonic stem cells under a microscope at the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center in Madison.

research can never be a reasonable or enlightened form of science, but only a regression to barbarism and the dangerous backwaters of ideologically driven research."

As Pope John Paul II warned, "a nation that kills its children is a nation without a future."

Mary Claire Kendall served as special assistant to the assistant secretary for health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1989 to 1993.