

National Health Council Position Statement

In Support of Supports Stem Cell Research

July 2000

"Stem Cell research brings biomedical exploration to the edge of a new frontier that is extraordinarily promising. It may well offer great promise for advances in health care that can lead to the prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases and/or disabilities, giving hope to millions of patients and their families. Of critical importance is development of appropriate safeguards to allow this research to move forward."

Myrl Weinberg, CAE
President, National Health Council

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 1999, concluded that current law permits federal funds to be used for research utilizing human pluripotent stem cells. This decision, according to the DHHS, is consistent with existing Congressional restrictions on human embryo research and with federal law and regulations governing human fetal tissue research. The National Institutes of Health currently is reviewing guidelines that address the ethical, legal, and moral issues surrounding this research.

The Council strongly believes that federal funding of stem cell research represents the most effective and ethical way of moving this science forward. Stem cell research may, in time, help us develop treatments and even cures for chronic conditions. For example, this research could help develop replacement cells and tissue to treat many diseases and conditions, including Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis; help us understand abnormal cell growth that occurs in cancer and leads to birth defects; and change the way we develop drugs and test them for safety and potential efficacy.

Therefore, the National Health Council believes that stem cell research should move forward under strict guidelines that provide proper oversight and public accountability.

The Council applauds Senator Arlen Specter, Senator Tom Harkin, and others for recognizing the value and necessity of stem cell research, as well as the need to ensure that both strict ethical guidelines and a mechanism of public oversight are integrated with this research.

As part of its support for stem cell research, the Council sponsored a briefing with NIH staff for voluntary health agencies, also called patient-based groups, to discuss the issues relating to stem cell research and works closely with Congressional offices coordinating meetings and disseminating information.