

findings

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEBRASKANS FOR RESEARCH AND THE NEBRASKA COALITION FOR LIFESAVING CURES Volume 7, Number 1

Nebraskans for Research Salutes Richard Holland at Sixth Annual Tribute Luncheon



Nebraskans for Research will honor Richard "Dick" Holland, community leader and retired advertising agency CEO, at its annual tribute luncheon on Monday, April 14.

The luncheon will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Happy Hollow Club, 1710 S. 105th St. in Omaha.

Individual seats at the luncheon can be purchased for \$50 and tables of 10 for \$500. Luncheon reservations can be made on NFR's web site, www.nebraskansforresearch.org, or by contacting Victoria Kohout at 390-2461 or by e-mail: Victoria@nebraskansforresearch.org.

An Omaha native, Holland attended Omaha University (now UNO). Initially, his major was chemistry, but following service during World War II as an officer in the chemical corps, he determined a career in chemical engineering was not for him.

He returned to complete his degree and switched his major to art. After graduation, he took over the advertising business of his father, Lewis Holland. In 1957, he helped establish the Holland, Dreves, Reilly advertising agency in Omaha. Holland remained a principal member until he retired, having built Omaha's second-largest advertising business.

Holland and his late wife Mary have been tremendous community visionaries, committing their talents and finances to a variety of initiatives, projects and programs that have helped shape the future of Omaha.

After Mary's death, Holland has continued to embrace projects that broaden and enrich the community. Two contributions in this area are: The Holland Center for Performing Arts, which engages audiences in a variety of artistic venues; and The Holland Lecture Series, initiated in 2005 to address a variety of important ethical and global issues by stimulating discussion and thinking.

With a passion for new ideas, it's no surprise that the Hollands have been longtime supporters of research. Their financial contributions helped build the state-of-the-art Durham Research Center and, most recently, the second research tower currently under construction at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Holland was also instrumental in founding the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures which has energized many key business and community leaders in the effort to ensure a supportive research climate in Nebraska.

Proceeds from the luncheon go to support Nebraskans for Research, a 501(c)3 organization, whose members cross all party lines and live in communities across Nebraska. NFR is dedicated to promoting and supporting life-saving research and ensuring that it flourishes in our state.

Nebraskans for Research initiated this luncheon in 2003 to recognize people who have been champions of research in Nebraska.

Previous recipients of this honor include:

- 2007 Dr. James Armitage
- 2006 Harold and Marian Andersen
- 2005 Rik and Dr. Shannon Bonness
- 2004 Dr. Michael F. Sorrell
- 2003 Charles Durham

2 findings

President's Corner

by Sanford Goodman, President - Nebraskans for Research and Research Nebraska, Inc.

Are there compelling, scientific reasons to stop human embryonic stem cell research, including somatic cell nuclear transfer (collectively referred to hereafter as hESCR)? The answer to this question is critical to the determination of appropriate public policy regarding this research.

At a legislative study hearing in Lincoln in November, hESCR opponents put forward an accomplished neurobiology researcher from the University of Utah, who argued that hESCR should not be pursued because it is unnecessary, inefficient and unlikely to yield clinically useful therapies.

The venue in which these arguments were delivered is itself a telling indicator as to their scientific validity. While legislators are highly intelligent and well-educated, they are not scientists active in the fields of research under scrutiny.

Scientific arguments should be made before other scientists. The process by which scientific research funding is allocated and scientific research results are evaluated is among the most competitive and highly scrutinized endeavors known to man.

There is virtual consensus within the scientific community that hESCR is a vital research field within the totality of medical research. The equal time given to both sides of this supposedly scientific argument during the hearing grossly overstates the legitimacy of the anti-hESCR arguments in that community.

Certainly, all organizations and groups are subject to "group think" where the collective judgment takes on a momentum of its own, making it difficult for dissenting views to take hold. But, in the highly scrutinized and competitive world of medical research, it is hard to imagine an unnecessary and inefficient endeavor continuing for long.

Ironically, the classic example of such an occurrence came about when science policy was driven by political, rather than scientific, considerations. In the former Soviet Union, Josef Stalin brutally suppressed those who disagreed with his favorite, biologist Trofim Lysenko, who advocated the invalid Lamarkian theories of heritable acquired characteristics. This resulted in massive crop failures and famine when the supposed hybrid crops created via these invalid methods failed.

The other purportedly scientific reason against hESCR advanced last November by the researcher from Utah is that hESCR is unlikely to ever yield clinically useful therapies. She based this pessimistic assessment on a litany of obstacles that must be overcome before hESC would be useful clinically – but only in the very narrow sense of clinically useful therapies involving the direct transplantation of hESC cells or tissues derived from them.

hESCR has application in a broad range of research, where the study of hESC may provide profound insights into many aspects of development and the intra-cellular biology of disease, areas in which the obstacles cited do not prevent the development of clinically useful therapies based on those insights.

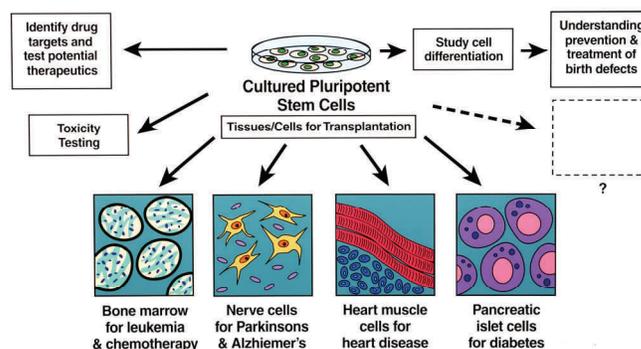
Nonetheless, even this core argument collapsed when Dr. David Crouse of the University of Nebraska Medical Center noted that the researcher's own field faced many similar issues and had not yielded any clinically useful therapies in the past two decades of intense research. Such slow progress characterizes the vast majority of medical research, Dr. Crouse further noted, and is not a reason to discontinue research that is progressing, even if slowly, where eventual success could make a profound difference in improving public health.

(And the research moves faster than the Utah researcher thinks. At the time she made the assertion at the hearing that it was uncontested and absolutely unambiguously the fact that cells derived from ESC do not function normally when transplanted into animals, a paper had already been submitted for publication in Nature Medicine that showed the opposite in the case of mouse muscle cells derived very carefully from mouse ESC.)

In defense of her position the researcher noted that her research does not raise any great moral controversial issues. She also stated falsely that hESC researchers lie by claiming that they will provide cures tomorrow and giving an incomplete and misleading picture of the prospects for hESCR.

So, at the end of the day, this researcher's purportedly scientific arguments rested on a moral assertion and a false statement, not an accurate evaluation of the state of the science.

The Promise of Stem Cell Research



Lincoln Journal Star - Stem cell bill moves forward

By JoAnne Young February 21, 2008

Senators, NU officials, pro-life groups reach truce.

A dispute between pro-life advocates and stem cell researchers that has simmered in Nebraska nearly a decade moved closer to resolution Wednesday. Senators on the Legislature's Judiciary Committee advanced a bill from committee deemed a true compromise, worked out by Omaha Sens. Steve Lathrop and Brad Ashford with University of Nebraska officials and pro-life groups.

"Essentially, we have a truce between the medical center and pro-life groups," Lathrop said.

The bill (LB606) would ban the use of public funds and facilities to create or destroy embryos. It also would create an advisory committee to establish a grant process for nonembryonic stem cell research.

Former Sen. Chip Maxwell, of the Nebraska Coalition for Ethical Research, said some believed the agreement was impossible.

Lathrop "engaged both sides and held on to complete a wild ride of negotiation that produced something concrete and positive in research policy," Maxwell said.

While the bill isn't comprehensive, he said, it blocks research in the public sector that would end in the disposal of an embryo.

The compromise legislation advances without a section that prohibits reproductive cloning and makes it a felony. University officials wanted that section left in to clarify the issue so people who don't understand the research done at the University of Nebraska Medical Center won't be misled into thinking it's reproductive cloning.

Julie Schmit-Albin, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, said it was imperative to remove the section because, in her interpretation, it put into law that if an embryo was created through cloning, it must be killed.

"While bioethics is not an area that invites compromise, we acknowledge that we gain enough with LB606 to merit supporting it," she said.

Pro-life advocates, including Maxwell; Schmit-Albin; Dave Bydalek, executive director of Family First; and Greg Schleppenbach, with the Nebraska Catholic Conference, made a good faith agreement that this would be the final word on stem cell research unless:

*Private sector researchers begin activities that destroy embryos or use somatic cell nuclear transfer.

*Future research causes ethical concerns not contemplated by either side.

*The state violates the terms of the prohibition.

The bill doesn't impact the type of research done at UNMC, because researchers there are not interested in destroying embryos, said Ron Withem, University of Nebraska lobbyist. But in an ideal world, these research issues wouldn't even be taken to the Legislature, he said.

The agreement validates the use of existing cell lines obtained from other sources for research, and that's a good thing, he said. And it's important that this is the final statement on the issue of research so that the university won't be back testifying in front of the committee on stem cell research bills, he said. "That's very positive."

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Taking Exception

Standing in the Way of Stem Cell Research
By Alan I. Leshner and James A. Thomson
Monday, December 3, 2007;
Page A17
(This opinion piece was published in the Washington Post)

A new way to trick skin cells into acting like embryos changes both everything and nothing at all. Being able to reprogram skin cells into multipurpose stem cells without harming embryos launches an exciting new line of research. It's important to remember, though, that we're at square one, uncertain at this early stage whether souped-up skin cells hold the same promise as their embryonic cousins do.

Far from vindicating the current U.S. policy of withholding federal funds from many of those working to develop potentially lifesaving embryonic stem cells, recent papers in the journals *Science* and *Cell* described a breakthrough achieved despite political restrictions. In fact, work by both the U.S. and Japanese teams that reprogrammed skin cells depended entirely on previous embryonic stem cell research.

At a time when nearly 60 percent of Americans support human embryonic stem cell research, U.S. stem cell policy runs counter to both scientific and public opinion. President Bush's repeated veto of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, which has twice passed the House and Senate with votes from Republicans and Democrats alike, further ignores the will of the American people.

Efforts to harness the versatility of embryonic stem cells, and alleviate suffering among people with an array of debilitating disorders, began less than 10 years ago. Since then, scientists have continued to pursue embryonic stem cells because of their ability to transform into blood, bone, skin or any other type of cell. The eventual goal is to replace diseased or dysfunctional cells to help people with spinal cord injuries, neurodegenerative disorders, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and other conditions.

Since 1998, many strategies for addressing sanctity-of-life concerns have been pursued. While commendable, these efforts remain preliminary, and none so far has suggested a magic bullet. In the same way, the recent tandem advances in the United States and by Shinya Yamanaka's team in Japan are far from being a Holy Grail, as Charles Krauthammer inaccurately described them. Though potential landmarks, these studies are only a first step on the long road toward eventual therapies.

Krauthammer's central argument -- that the president's misgivings about embryonic stem cell research inspired innovative alternatives -- is fundamentally flawed, too. Yamanaka was of course working in Japan, and scientists around the world are pursuing the full spectrum of options, in many cases faster than researchers in the United States.

Reprogrammed skin cells, incorporating four specific

genes known to play a role in making cells versatile, or pluripotent, did seem to behave like embryonic stem cells in mice. But mouse studies frequently fail to pan out in humans, so we don't yet know whether this approach is viable for treating human diseases. We simply cannot invest all our hopes in a single approach. Federal funding is essential for both adult and embryonic stem cell research, even as promising alternatives are beginning to emerge.

Unfortunately, under the policy President Bush outlined on Aug. 9, 2001, at most 21 stem cell lines derived from embryos before that date are eligible for federal funding. American innovation in the field thus faces inherent limitations. Even more significant, the stigma resulting from the policy surely has discouraged some talented young Americans from pursuing stem cell research.

Discomfort with the notion of extracting stem cells from embryos is understandable. But many of the life-changing medical advances of recent history, including heart transplantation, have provoked discomfort. Struggling with bioethical questions remains a critical step in any scientific advancement.

A solution that might be more comfortable for many people already exists but cannot be pursued unless the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act becomes law. Some percentage of the hundreds of thousands of frozen embryos from fertility clinics will eventually be destroyed. American couples meanwhile are not being

given the choice to donate their frozen embryos to federal research to help others through stem cell advances. It remains to be seen whether reprogrammed skin cells will differ in significant ways from embryonic stem cells. We remain hopeful, but it's too early to say we're certain.

We hope Congress will override the president's veto of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act. Further delays in pursuing the clearly viable option of embryonic stem cells will result in an irretrievable loss of time, especially if the new approach fails to prove itself.

Alan I. Leshner is chief executive of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and executive publisher of the journal Science. James A. Thomson is a professor of anatomy at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. He was the first scientist to create human embryonic stem cells and is the senior author on the recent Science paper describing a method for reprogramming skin cells

Notes from the Executive Director

by Victoria Kohout, Executive Director

Nebraskans for Research has undergone some exciting changes since the last newsletter. We have recently reorganized our efforts on behalf of medical research in Nebraska, expanding our resources and community support. I began my position as full time Executive Director for Nebraskans for Research on November 12th. It has been an exciting three months with much accomplished and much left to do.

We now have an office in Omaha. Our new address is: 8401 W. Dodge Rd., Ste. 100, Omaha, NE 68114. Along with a new address we also have a new phone number 402-390-2461.

Nebraskans for Research will continue to exist, along with our 501 (c)4 affiliate, Research Nebraska. We will also identify ourselves as the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures. Our officers have changed and our board of directors has expanded. Mr. Richard Holland is Chairman of the Board with Sandy Goodman serving as President. Other officers include: Judy Haecker, Vice President; Lynne Boyer, Secretary and John Wilson, Treasurer.

During the last three months our efforts have been focused on legislation including the defeat of LB 700 and passage of a compromise LB 606. In addition we have formed, with the assistance of Drs. David Crouse and Jim Turpen, Nebraska Scientists for Responsible Stem Cell Research; a group of scientists from across the state that is committed to the importance of stem cell research. To learn more about Nebraska Scientists for Responsible Stem Cell Research visit our website at www.nebraskansforresearch.org.

We are excited to be honoring Mr. Richard Holland at our 6th Annual Tribute Luncheon. Mr. Holland has a long standing commitment to protecting and expanding medical research in Nebraska. I would like to thank Jean Bell for agreeing to chair the luncheon this year. If you are interested in purchasing tickets please call 402-390-2461.

Our membership and public education committees are busy working on plans for 2008 to increase our membership and education efforts.

A special thank you to Carol Russell, the immediate past president of Nebraskans for Research, for all of her hard work during the past several years.

Thank you for your involvement and support of Nebraskans for Research. I look forward to working together in 2008 to achieve many of our goals.

Stem Cell Question & Answer

What is an embryonic stem cell?

Embryonic stem cells are derived from the cells that make up the inner cell mass of the blastocyst. Both mouse and human embryonic stem cell lines exist. Mouse embryonic stem cells are capable of generating any and all cells in the body, under the right conditions. Therefore, they are said to be pluripotent and have unlimited potential as far as growth and differentiation. The cells divide continuously in tissue culture dishes in an incubator, but at the same time maintain the ability to generate any cell type when placed into the correct environment to cause their differentiation.

Human embryonic stem cell lines are currently being studied and several research teams are working to determine whether or not they possess the same properties as mouse embryonic stem cells. Because human embryonic stem cells were isolated relatively recently, and therefore we know less about them, it is currently more difficult to work with human systems than mouse. However, scientists are making remarkable progress that could ultimately lead to therapies to replace or restore damaged tissues using these human cells.

Source: International Society for Stem Cell Research

The Legislative Front - Farewell to Friends

by Rich Lombardi, NFR Lobbyist

The Legislature is entering its final deliberations in its historic 100th Legislature, Second Session. Senator Chambers' thirty-eight years of historic service is nearing its conclusion. And a Legislative Bill numbered 606 and 606A is quietly awaiting the Legislature's Final Reading passage and then a signing by the Governor. The journey of this bill will be discussed for sometime. I will not dwell on it here. Except to say, the persistent voice of citizens inspired by hope succeeded in preventing the criminalizing of biomedical research in the State of Nebraska.

The road ahead is exciting. No matter who wins the Presidential race a new direction in federal policy on stem cell research will arise. The upcoming elections within the State hold promise that newly elected public officials might view the Legislature's role towards biomedical research somewhat differently than the previous inhabitants. Unfortunately the State of Nebraska will be losing some of medical research's strongest legislative proponents.

We would like to urge you to send a note to the following State Senators serving their last Legislative Session for their years of courage and persistence to keep Nebraska as a leading contributor to the world of medical research.

Senator DiAnna Schimek	dschimek@leg.ne.gov
Senator Ernie Chambers	
Senator Joel Johnson	jjohnson@leg.ne.gov
Senator Lowen Kruse	lkruse@leg.ne.gov
Senator Vickie McDonald	vmcdonald@leg.ne.gov

These Senators can be reached by postal mailing to the Nebraska Legislature, State Capitol Building, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509.

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