



Daily Women's Health Policy

Wall Street Journal Profiles Researcher Who Proposes Technique That Could Produce Stem Cells Without Harming Embryos

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The *Wall Street Journal* on Saturday profiled researcher Donald Landry, chair of Columbia University's Department of Medicine, who has proposed a laboratory technique that could generate human embryonic stem cells without creating or destroying human embryos (Naik, *Wall Street Journal*, 6/16).

Landry and HHS fellow Howard Zucker in the Nov. 1, 2004, issue of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* proposed that scientists could harvest stem cells from human embryos originally created for in vitro fertilization that "no longer have the capacity for human life." The cells have stopped dividing in such embryos, which become "organismically dead" because of biological accidents that occur within days of fertilization, according to Landry and Zucker. The researchers said that removing stem cells from these embryos is no different than using the organs of a brain-dead person for a transplant (*Kaiser Daily Women's Health Policy Report*, 12/6/04).

Landry, who is Catholic, said he believes harvesting stem cells from a human embryo is an immoral destruction of life but added that as a physician he believes stem cell advances could save lives. "The destruction of nascent human life is something that society should be wary of," Landry said, adding, "I think I've found a potentially simple answer to the problem."

Landry in April presented his work to Senate staffers, and his proposal was subsequently included in a bill (S 30), co-sponsored by Sens. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) and Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), that would allow federal funding for stem cell research using embryos with no chance of survival. The Senate in April voted 70-28 to approve the measure, called the HOPE Act, and it now awaits debate in the House. Landry in July 2006 received a \$1 million grant from New York state to assemble a team at Columbia to conduct experiments on his approach.

According to the *Journal*, some scientists have said that the embryos Landry proposes using typically have stopped dividing due to genetic errors and that those defects could potentially be transmitted to patients receiving tissue transplants derived from the embryos. The bill incorporating Landry's idea "would be a significant step backwards" for science in the U.S., Harold Varmus, president of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, wrote in a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.). He added, "Limiting the scope of research in this way places a muzzle on the scientific process, placing short-term incremental advances ahead of the more challenging goals of preventing or curing diseases." Varmus said the legislation is an effort to "provide political cover for people who want it both ways -- to say they voted for stem cells but without offending their political base."

Landry said no genetic defects have been found so far in the 400 human embryos he and his colleagues have examined that were kept in an IVF clinic in New York. Responding to Varmus' charges, Landry said, "If science can advance without violating the ethical sensibilities of half the

populace, what's the downside?" He added, "The ultimate use of embryonic stem cells ... is the treatment of patients. Those patients are going to have their opinion on the morality of destroying embryos."

According to the *Journal*, some researchers are questioning whether the embryos Landry is examining can be defined as dead. "In our haste to obtain what we want, we may be killing an embryo," Tadeusz Pacholczyk, a neuroscientist and ethicist at the National Catholic Bioethics Center, said (*Wall Street Journal*, 6/16).