

## Here's how to do ethical stem cell research

SUSAN CUTAIA special to the Times  
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After previously proposing support for the funding of embryonic stem cell research, Gov. Charlie Crist recently announced that he would support a bill sponsored by Rep. Anitere Flores, R-Miami, which provides funding only for stem cell research that does not involve the further destruction of a human embryo. His actions sparked both praise and criticism, but what the governor did was the right action to take.

Stem cell research and regenerative medicine hold a lot of promise for the future, although there is a dispute among scientists over which avenues for stem cell research have the most promise. What is clear is that adult stem cells are producing. The fact that they are more stable and more like the cells our bodies need as compared to the volatile and rapidly changing youngest embryonic cells makes them incredibly useful. According to experts, they are being used in more than 70 therapies and may hold the key to curing such diseases as diabetes and Parkinson's.

Despite emotional appeals that ignore the benefits of ethically derived stem cell research, not a single person has been cured or received any clinical benefit from human embryonic stem cell research involving the destruction of a live human embryo. Recent research also has shown that the stem cells found in amniotic fluid have as much versatility in petri dishes as the more controversial embryonic stem cells.

So what is the source of the stem cell debate? Is it truly a debate about science, or is it more of a philosophical debate about when life begins? As a matter of basic biology, a human life begins when an embryo is created, but there is no consensus in our society as to what value to place on human life in its earliest, embryonic form. But does it matter?

The facts in this controversy are clear. Adult stem cells are producing vitally needed therapies and cures. Using for research embryonic stem cells that have been obtained from a destroyed human embryo creates a vast array of ethical issues and debate, but recent discoveries have shown that amniotic stem cells have as much or more research promise as those found in human embryos. We don't really need to have a debate on this. We all agree that we need to pursue stem cell research, and science has given us a way to do it in an unquestionably ethical manner.

What Flores' bill does is allow proponents on both sides of the issue a chance to work hard together on the promise of stem cell research. Crist's compromise reflects both a humble recognition of Floridians' diverse views and a desire to seek common ground. The funding proposed this year and his endorsement of the Flores plan is an excellent step forward for Florida.

Susan Cutaia is a Boca Raton business owner and president of Citizens for Science and Ethics, which supports an amendment to the Florida Constitution to ban spending state money for "experiments that involve destruction of a live human embryo."

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