

Alan I. Leshner
Chief Executive Officer and
Executive Publisher, *Science*

July 18, 2005

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As early as this week, the U.S. Senate will address the medically promising subject of human embryonic stem cell research. On behalf of AAAS, the largest general science society in the world and publisher of the peer-reviewed journal *Science*, we urge you to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the bill introduced by Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) that would expand the current federal policy to enable researchers to gain greater access to new embryonic stem cell lines.

Recently, there has been discussion of alternative methods of generating stem cells without the destruction of human embryos. As exciting as these scientific approaches may appear, the research is still in its early stages and we do not yet know whether they will produce useful stem cell lines. Although research along these lines is ongoing in a number of laboratories, no peer-reviewed articles reporting successful results in animals or humans have been published.

We believe it is important not to confuse this subject with the issue addressed in the Specter/Harkin bill, which focuses on stem cell research utilizing cell lines derived from existing embryos created through *in vitro* fertilization. As we have stated in the past and continue to believe, it is only through federal support of research on both adult and embryonic stem cells that we may better understand the potential value and limitations of each type.

We believe strongly that embryonic stem cell research should proceed in an ethical manner that engenders public confidence. We explored this complex subject in our 1999 report, *Stem Cell Research and Applications: Monitoring the Frontiers of Biomedical Research*, and concluded:

- An important, ethical source of human stem cells is from embryos produced for *in vitro* fertilization and whose progenitors have decided not to implant them.
- Persons considering donating their excess embryos for research purposes should be afforded the highest standards of protection for the informed consent and voluntary intent of their decision. This should include options for donating to other infertile couples, destroying them, or donating them for research purposes.
- The informed consent process should maintain a separation between personnel working with the woman or couple desiring to get pregnant and personnel requesting embryos for stem cell research.

These same principles are also reflected in the 2005 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report outlining guidelines for stem cell research. More importantly, the legislation introduced by Senators Specter and Harkin is consistent with them.

AAAS has stated that policy makers must reassess the Administration's August 2001 policy periodically "so that changes may be made in order to realize to the fullest extent possible the benefits of this promising field of research." That time is now before us. We owe all those who may be helped by such research in the future to pursue all avenues of potential treatments and cures for serious diseases.

AAAS stands ready to work with the U.S. Congress in addressing this complex subject. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/326-6639.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan I. Leshner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alan I. Leshner