

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Senate Prepares to Vote at Last On a Trio of Stem Cell Bills

Senate leaders have formally agreed to allow a vote—possibly this month—on a bill that would allow federally funded researchers to work on newly derived lines of human embryonic stem (ES) cells. The bipartisan deal announced last week was painstakingly cobbled together over the past few months to placate opponents by including one bill that would promote “alternatives” to embryo destruction for obtaining stem cells and another that would outlaw “embryo farms.”

Supporters of stem cell research have lobbied hard for an up-or-down vote in the Senate on a bill, passed in May 2005 by the House (H.R. 810), that would allow federally funded researchers access to cell lines derived after the presidentially imposed cut-off date of 9 August 2001 (*Science*, 3 June 2005, p. 1388). Last summer, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) reversed his previous opposition to human ES cell research and said he supported H.R. 810. But as the months rolled by without a Senate vote, many stem cell boosters began to worry that Frist, a physician who is leaving the Senate at the end

The Senate is expected to vote this summer on these three bills:

- * **H.R. 810: Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act**
Allows government funds for research using new stem cell lines.
- * **S. 2754: Alternative Pluripotent Stem Cell Therapies Enhancement Act**
Promotes research on ways to derive stem cells without harming human embryos.
- * **S. 3504: Fetus Farming Prohibition Act**
Outlaws use of tissues from embryos gestated for research purposes.

of the year for what is expected to be a run for president, might be dodging the issue for political gain.

But it turns out that Frist, along with stem cell advocates Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA), has been working hard to win a so-called unanimous consent

agreement that commits members to the terms of the vote. The last piece to fall into place, apparently, was convincing fellow physician Tom Coburn (R-OK) to drop his own “alternatives” bill in favor of the agreed-upon legislative troika. Frist’s office says he intends to schedule a vote before the Senate goes into its August recess.

Under the agreement, H.R. 810 will be buffered by two bills designed to appeal to opponents of embryo destruction. One (S. 2754), co-sponsored by Specter and Rick Santorum (R-PA), calls on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to promote research on finding ways to derive pluripotent cells other than from embryos. The bill would only reinforce current NIH policies, NIH stem cell czar James Battey told senators last week at a hearing on the legislation. The other measure (S.3504), co-sponsored by Santorum and Sam Brownback (R-KS), prohibits trading in tissues from human fetuses “gestated [in humans or animals] for research purposes.” This is already prohibited under federal funding rules and would in any case be ethically taboo for legitimate researchers. Because the bills are not mutually exclusive, the Senate could easily pass all three. ▶

International Standards Proposed for Stem Cell Work

TORONTO—Scientists who work on stem cells have proposed draft guidelines to set ethical standards for researchers around the world. The guidelines, which are the work of an international committee, lay out ground rules for work with embryos and the cells derived from them. The document also recommends ethical standards for obtaining sperm, eggs, embryos, or other cells from human donors.

The guidelines are consistent with those set out by the U.S. National Academies last year (*Science*, 29 April 2005, p. 611), but “we extend and refine those principles” for the international community, George Daley of Harvard Medical School in Boston said at a meeting* here last week. Daley, who headed the drafting committee with 30 members from 14 countries, says the document should ease collaborations between scientists who live in regions of the world with different laws and local regulations regarding use of embryos or informed consent of tissue donors.

The guidelines recommend that certain types of research, such as derivation of new embryonic stem cell lines or generation of chimeric animals, be subject to special review by an independent panel. In some

* International Society for Stem Cell Research 4th Annual Meeting, 29 June–1 July, Toronto, Canada.

cases, the panel may be at the investigator’s institution; others might be governed by a regional or national review. The guidelines also set standards for sharing research materials including reagents, animal strains, and cell lines and urge scientists to deposit new cell lines at national or international cell banks.

Committee members said their most intense debates concerned how to fairly compensate women who donate oocytes for research. People who donate bone marrow for research, for example, are usually paid for their time, discomfort, and inconvenience, but several committee members felt strongly that oocyte donors should not be offered any compensation beyond reimbursement for their expenses. In the end, the committee agreed that local review boards should ensure that compensation does not “constitute an undue inducement” but otherwise left the final decision up to local laws and practices.

The committee plans to draw up template documents for material transfer agreements and informed consent for the donation of cells or embryos. Daley says such templates would have made the work dramatically easier as he and his colleagues prepared to begin human nuclear transfer experiments this spring.

ISSCR members have 60 days to comment on the draft, which has been posted on the society’s Web site. The committee hopes to issue a final document by the end of the year.

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