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Faith and Policy

Embryonic hype overshadows adult stem cell success stories

Paul A. Long

Although stem cell research has been in the midst of public debate for several years, a majority of the public is unaware that adult stem cell research is finding treatments, even cures, for diseases while protecting human embryos from being killed.

That's why the Michigan Catholic Conference last week distributed to more than 500,000 Catholic homes and 800 parishes educational material regarding the differences between adult and embryonic stem cell research. The education program intends to overcome an onslaught of misinformation about this critically important subject.

A central message of the church's program is to communicate its unwavering support for adult stem cell research, which is helping to treat dozens of diseases without cloning and killing human embryos -- as embryonic stem cell research necessitates.

Juvenile diabetes, sickle cell anemia, Parkinson's disease and numerous forms of cancer and blood disease are all being treated with stem cells derived safely from locations throughout the human body.

Fat tissue, dental pulp, the amniotic fluid that surrounds unborn babies, umbilical cord blood and bone marrow are all areas where adult stem cells can be found. Cord blood and bone marrow can be donated, stored or matched at participating hospitals across Michigan so their stem cells can help suffering patients.

Yet while celebrities and other high-profile individuals campaign on behalf of embryonic stem cell research, success stories from everyday people such as that of Carol Franz rarely, if ever, make the front page.

In her testimony before the U.S. Senate this past March, Franz made the following statement: "I have survived two bouts of multiple myeloma cancer due to the Grace of God and two adult stem cell transplants."

According to congressional testimony by Stephen Sprague: "All of the patients you have heard from today are here willing to be living examples of proven adult stem cell technologies. We are not wishes, hopes and promises of possible cures -- we are the proud and fortunate

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results of stem cell promises kept."

Just Google their names; both of these individuals tell powerful stories of how adult stem cell therapies have saved their lives.

Unfortunately, the hype of unproven embryonic stem cell research has greatly overshadowed the successes of adult stem cell research. So much so that some elected officials are attempting to overturn a state law that protects human embryos from being killed.

"They'll otherwise be discarded" is the cliché argument. But once the very limited number of frozen embryos are unconscionably destroyed in the hopes of finding the same treatments and cures that have already been found with adult stem cells, from where will surplus embryos come?

The answer is: Follow the monetary trail toward unregulated embryo research.

In the meantime, take a few moments to learn more about donating cord blood or matching bone marrow. You quite literally could be saving someone like Carol Franz's life.

Paul A. Long is vice president of public policy for the Michigan Catholic Conference. Please fax comments to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail to letters@detnews.com.

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