



Everything Michigan

Group wants to educate Michigan public about embryonic stem cells

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By **KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN**

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LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Cathy Coury looks forward to the day when researchers may find a cure for the juvenile diabetes that makes her young sons' lives a constant round of insulin shots and blood-sugar monitoring.

On Monday, she joined with researchers from the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, elected officials and policy makers to formally kick off a bipartisan group that plans to make the case that Michigan's tough restriction on embryonic stem cell research is blocking important medical gains and hurting the state's economy.

"I want to know researchers are out there exploring every option," said Coury, who lives in Grand Rapids and is the legislative chairwoman of the West Michigan Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

The stem cell advocacy group doesn't plan to endorse any lawmakers or any specific legislation. But it does hope to make its case with the public that the state is losing out on potential cures and economic benefits by restricting embryonic stem cell research.

It already has a Web site and plans an electronic newsletter, a speaker's bureau and future public forums.

"If we don't use embryos that are going to be discarded anyway ... it pushes the cures farther and farther away," U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., said during a Lansing news conference unveiling the nonprofit group Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures.

Added U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, a Republican from Battle Creek: "A state like Michigan ought to be right out there among the leaders in embryonic stem cell research and not have laws that create barriers. ... There is nothing more pro-life than helping the living."

Right to Life of Michigan and the Michigan Catholic Conference are opposed to legislation being sponsored by state Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, that would allow more embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. They say it would allow human embryos to be destroyed to harvest their stem cells.

Supporters of embryonic stem cell research say the embryos are left over from fertility treatments and would be disposed of anyway.

The opposition of Right to Life and the Catholic Conference is one reason legislation has passed in Michigan encouraging the creation of a network of stem cell banks for umbilical cords and adult stem cells donated by patients, but the restrictions on embryonic stem cell research remain.

Michigan Catholic Conference spokesman Dave Maluchnik said Monday that he thinks embryonic stem cell advocates, finding themselves stymied by the Legislature, will try to take the issue to Michigan voters.

"I think the process today began a ballot campaign for 2008 on this issue," he said.

Maluchnik said current research on adult stem cells is finding cures without having to use embryonic stem cells.

"We have a message of being positive and wanting to find cures as well, and we think we can do that through adult stem cells," he said.

Schwarz, an ear, nose and throat specialist, disputed that. He said embryonic stem cells can foster more cures than adult stem cells or umbilical cord stem cells.

Sean Morrison, director of the University of Michigan Center for Stem Cell Biology, agreed with Schwarz that embryonic stem cell research offers potential medical advancements that adult stem cell research does not. He warned about legislating "out of ignorance and misinformation."

State law does not permit Michigan researchers to get embryos left over from fertility treatments in the state. State scientists can use embryonic stem cell lines from California, Illinois or other states with less restrictive laws, but those lines sometimes are patented by other researchers.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has asked citizens to voice their support for easing restrictions on embryonic stem cell research in Michigan by signing an online petition. The Democratic governor said during her State of the State speech earlier this year that fewer restrictions on stem cell research could boost investment in life sciences and help Michigan's economy.

Schwarz last month lost the 7th District Republican primary election to Tim Walberg after Walberg said he was too liberal for the district and used Schwarz's vote in favor of expanding embryonic stem cell research against him.

Schwarz noted most members of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate voted the same way, but the legislation was vetoed by President Bush and Congress was unable to muster enough votes to overturn the veto.

On the Net:

Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures: <http://www.stemcellresearchformichigan.com>

Right to Life of Michigan: <http://www.rtl.org>

Michigan Catholic Conference: <http://www.micatholicconference.org>

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