

# Cheboygan Daily Tribune

## Don't Let Rhetoric Stand in Way of Stem Cell Cures

*As submitted to the Cheboygan Daily Tribune by MCSCRC board member Kathleen Russell*

The author of a recent opinion piece raised the following question regarding Stem Cell research.

Who's right? Obviously somebody is wrong. So, who's lying? (J. Barber)

As a person living with young-onset Parkinson's disease I raise the question,

“What if we chose to work together to reform Michigan's laws to allow carefully regulated embryonic stem cell research using those embryos that would otherwise be discarded?”

Let me speak more personally for a moment,

According to the Michigan Parkinson's Foundation there are 40,000 people in Michigan living with Parkinson's disease. I am one of them.

I was 39 when I was diagnosed with young onset Parkinson's disease. I am now 48.

For me, embryonic stem cell research represents new hope. Hope that these cells do have the potential to treat or cure a range of serious human ailments, not only for Parkinson's disease, but for diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, birth defects, spinal cord injury, burns and more.

Embryonic stem cells are primitive cells that can be generated in a laboratory dish. Four to five days after an egg is fertilized by sperm, the dividing mass of cells is called a blastocyst. To make an embryonic stem cell line from blastocysts, the inner cell mass is removed and stem cells can be grown in a separate dish in a lab. Under the right conditions, these embryonic stem cells retain the ability to divide and make copies of themselves apparently indefinitely. This is called an embryonic stem cell line.

Interestingly, the state's law today allows creation of embryos, but does not prevent the destruction of them -- unless they are used for research.

This simply does not make sense to me.

Because I am not a scientist I look to those who are for guidance on this profound issue.

NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, a top notch Scientist who was appointed by President Bush. His guidance?

“From my standpoint, it is clear today that American science will be better served, and the nation will be better served, if we let our scientists have access to more stem cell lines. I think it is important for us not to fight with one hand tied behind our back . . .”

Each year hundreds of human embryos, created in fertility clinics that provide hope to loving families seeking children, are discarded in Michigan.

I return to my question: “What if we chose to work together to reform Michigan’s laws to allow carefully regulated embryonic stem cell research using those embryos that would otherwise be discarded?”

Surveys show about 70 percent of state voters support such a reform, to allow our top researchers at universities and private biotech businesses to conduct research using embryonic stem cells.

Human embryonic stem cell research has only been conducted since 1998. Many scientists believe that studying these microscopic cells will not only lead to better understanding and potential treatment of a wide range of diseases and injuries, but also assist in the development of safer, more effective drugs.

I am currently in Stage 3 of this 5 Stage Disease. I call Stage 3 “Velcro is My Friend” for it is a time when buttoning a button, zipping a zipper or tying a shoe is increasingly difficult. I am painfully aware that even if we, the people of Michigan were to choose to work together and make 110% effort for a cure....it is likely we are 10 years out. 10 years = Stage 5 “a mind imprisoned in a body”.

I’m brave, but I am not this brave.

If Adult Stem Cells were in fact “curing some 70 diseases,” including Parkinson’s. I would not be writing this letter.

During the last Congressional Session, leadership voted to provide federal research dollars for embryonic stem cell research. Although this legislation was vetoed by President Bush, I believe it is important to note that those at the forefront - leading the charge for federal funding - were such staunch anti-abortion advocates as Republican Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Bill Frist of Tennessee.

Here in Michigan it is time to follow their lead.

As we work together to elevate informed dialogue and commit to civil discussion, know that credible information about embryonic stem cell research is available.

([www.StemCellResearchForMichigan.com](http://www.StemCellResearchForMichigan.com)) Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research & Cures is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing factual information on adult/tissue and embryonic stem cell research.

It's time to insist on the best that Michigan has to offer.

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