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Dr. Mel Lester: Embryonic Stem Cell Research Offers Hope

Numerous diseases could be fought with more knowledge

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Embryonic stem cell research holds tremendous promise in our search to reverse the ravages of incurable diseases and provide cures for our loved ones. This research can unlock the door of hope for children with juvenile diabetes, patients paralyzed by spinal cord injuries, and people silenced and shut down by Parkinson's disease.

Virtually every day, scientists are reporting exciting new breakthroughs in the search to find cures for some of our most devastating diseases.

Scientists are successfully coaxing embryonic stem cells - the body's natural repair kit - to form specific cells for specific functions, an amazing property that only embryonic stem cells have.

Because of these cells' unique properties, scientists have discovered ways to one day treat juvenile diabetes, paralyzing strokes, spinal injuries and potentially fatal heart diseases.

Michigan is home to some of the world's best scientific and medical minds who - if given all the tools they need - can join this important race against time to uncover much-needed cures and save lives in Michigan and beyond.

Unfortunately, Michigan is also home to one of the nation's most restrictive laws on embryonic stem cell research.

Our state joins South Dakota, North Dakota, Louisiana and Arkansas as the most regressive states when it comes to this important scientific pursuit.

Under Michigan law, it is legal to throw away embryos that couples donate for in vitro fertilization.

But scientists in Michigan who do research on cells that would otherwise be thrown away can be thrown in jail.

Michigan's outdated law doesn't save a single embryo from destruction - it only delays the search for a cure.

That's why it needs to change, and it needs to change fast.

The remaining major candidates for president all support extensive federal support for embryonic stem cell research. They have pledged to change federal policy, which limits government funding to only 20 existing - and contaminated - stem cell lines.

By next year, our new president will significantly throw open the doors to aggressive embryonic stem cell research, remove the shackles of current policy and lend the full power of the federal government to the search for cures.

There is strong public support for embryonic stem cell research because the public understands that it can lead to cures for devastating illnesses and injuries.

Unfortunately, the Michigan State Medical Society recently took a step backward when it changed its position on embryonic stem cell research from supportive to "neutral."

This is sending the wrong message to patients and their families. MSMS should be champions of the best science in the service of medicine. Instead, MSMS' reversal on this important research puts politics ahead of patients.

It is wrong to delay the search for cures, and it is wrong to allow Michigan's outdated law to shut the door of hope for countless patients and their families.

For the sake of patients, it's time Michigan joined the race to find cures and save lives.