

# [The Michigan Daily](#)

## **From the Daily: New life for stem cells Discovery must not be excuse for hindering progress**

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Scientists have made another breakthrough in the conflict-ridden realm of stem-cell research. On Sunday, researchers at Harvard and Wake Forest universities announced that amniotic stem cells - drawn from amniotic fluid without harm to the mother or fetus - promise potential benefits similar to those of embryonic stem cells.

However, the versatility of amniotic stem cells remains unclear, and some experts contend that this new method of stem-cell research is still more limited than research on embryonic stem cells. While amniotic stem cells are a very promising discovery that should be further explored, there's no reason for scientists to abandon the sure thing. Congress will soon discuss and likely pass a bill lifting the ban on federal funding for research on new embryonic stem-cell lines, and it would be an uncommon stroke of sensibility for President Bush to refrain from vetoing it again.

The Harvard and Wake Forest findings make use of stem cells found in the amniotic fluid of pregnant women. Scientists drew and cultivated amniotic stem cells without any harm to the mother or fetus - thereby eliminating several of the arguments pro-life conservatives make against embryonic stem-cell research.

Unlike adult stem cells, amniotic stem cells are flexible and can develop into many different types of tissue - including brain, liver and bone - making their possible medical application broad. Pregnant women can also freeze their amniotic stem cells, should their child need them in the future - thereby eliminating the risk of rejection of foreign tissue by the child's immune system.

However, the extent of the flexibility of amniotic stem cells remains unknown. The real advantage of amniotic stem cells is their ability to offer a less controversial alternative, but while this is beneficial in the short-term, it isn't an effective long term compromise.

Research on amniotic stem cells is years behind embryonic stem-cell research, and nothing has yet proven that amniotic stem cells could yield the same results. Embryonic stem cells can turn into more than 220 cell types that can be used to cure countless diseases like diabetes, brain cancer and Parkinson's.

Pro-life activists continue their opposition to embryonic stem-cell research because drawing stem cells kills the embryo. Regardless, this result is hardly different from the fate of the 90 percent of embryos that are discarded anyway. So what exactly is so anti-life about using such embryos to potentially save countless lives?

Embryonic stem-cell research in America has been notoriously and needlessly hindered since Bush's 2001 veto of Congress's bill to allow federal funds for research on new embryonic stem-cell lines. Scientists and the new Democratic Congress must not allow developments in amniotic stem cells to fuel complacency on the embryonic stem-cell issue.

Overly and unnecessarily restrictive embryonic stem-cell policy isn't a problem only on the federal level. Michigan, for example, has one of the most restrictive embryonic stem-cell research laws in the country. Because of such limitations, the University's hands are often tied. Top researchers and scientists hesitate to come to an institution in a state where their research may never be supported. The University's new \$100-million state-of-the-art Life Sciences Institute doesn't do much good in the way of contributing to a knowledge-based economy - not to mention saving lives - if state laws continue to stifle its potential. Federal and state legislators have no business tying scientists' hands on this issue.