

## **U.S. judge upholds federal embryonic stem cell funds**

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A U.S. judge Wednesday upheld the government rules that allow federal funding of human embryonic stem cell research that may lead to cures for deadly diseases affecting millions of Americans.

In a victory for the Obama administration, U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ruled the National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines on such research do not violate a 1996 federal law and he dismissed a legal challenge to the funding.

Lamberth a year ago had halted funding of the research. But he was reversed in a ruling by an appeals court in April. His latest decision was largely based on the appeals court's reasoning and conclusions.

Opponents of human embryonic stem cell research, including many religious conservatives, have argued that it is unacceptable because it destroys human embryos.

Scientists hope to be able to use stem cells to find treatments for spinal cord injuries, cancer, diabetes and diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Shortly after taking office in 2009, President Barack Obama expanded federal funding for research involving human embryonic stem cells in hopes it would lead to cures for diseases.

White House advisor Stephanie Cutter hailed the ruling.

"For too long, patients and families have suffered from debilitating, incurable diseases and we know that stem cell research offers hope to millions of Americans," she wrote in a White House blog. "President Obama is committed to supporting responsible stem cell research and today's ruling was another step in the right direction."

Attorneys involved in the challenge, including Alliance Defense Fund senior counsel Steven Aden, said they were weighing their options for appeal of the ruling.

"Americans should not be forced to pay for experiments that destroy human life, have produced no real-world treatments, and violate federal law," he said. "In these tough economic times, it makes no sense for the federal government to use taxpayer money for this illegal and unethical purpose."

Lamberth ruled Wednesday against two scientists, Dr. James Sherley, a biological engineer at Boston Biomedical Research Institute, and Theresa Deisher, of Washington-based AVM Biotechnology, who had sued in 2009 to block such funding.

The judge rejected their argument that the funding violated federal law. Following the appeals court, he said he must find that the federal government reasonably interpreted federal law to permit the funding.

He also rejected the argument that the government acted arbitrarily and capriciously in coming up with the guidelines.