



Stem Cells Derived From Amniotic Fluid No Substitute For Embryonic Cells

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The Genetics Policy Institute (GPI) applauds the discovery of apparently versatile stem cells in amniotic fluid as a positive development, but cautions that the research does not eliminate the need for embryonic stem cell research. "This discovery is a welcome development that opens up a new line of research," said Eve Herold, who is GPI's director of public policy research and education and also the author of the recent book, *Stem Cell Wars: Inside Stories from the Frontlines*. "However, much more work needs to be done before anyone can determine the cells' future clinical value." Over the weekend, a team of scientists led by Anthony Atala at Wake Forest University School of Medicine announced that it had cultured what appeared to be highly versatile stem cells, which were taken from the amniotic fluid of women who were about ten weeks pregnant.

Stem cell researcher Dr. Larry Goldstein, whose work at the University of California-San Diego focuses on neurons derived from embryonic stem cells, noted that the Wake Forest team had culled cells that appeared to be neurons. However, he said "Based on what they have published, the [amniotic fluid- derived] cells don't seem to make neurons as usable as what we routinely make with human embryonic stem cells. But perhaps with further work, their cells and methods will improve."

"People have been excited about new cell types in the past and were later disappointed," Herold cautioned. "Science is a slow process. Experiments need to be repeated and independently verified before they become established as facts. However, this line of research should definitely be pursued along with all other types of stem cell research. This early report does not suggest that we should abandon the science that has been proven over and over again to be so promising."

"There is only one 'card carrying' pluripotent human embryonic stem cell. Patients demanding cures must reject any attempted spin on this story claiming the work with fetal cells is an actual alternative to current embryonic stem cell research. Most scientists believe that different types of stem cells will eventually be needed to treat different diseases. For this entire field to advance, the current federal restrictions on funding must be lifted now," said Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute.

For more information about GPI, visit their website at <http://www.genpol.org>.

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