

Fla. Gov. Plans Money for Stem Cells

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) - Gov. Charlie Crist said Wednesday he plans to recommend that Florida lawmakers fund stem cell research, but only so long as it doesn't require the destruction of human embryos.

Crist said he would recommend appropriating \$20 million for a grant program to pay for studies that use cells obtained from adults, umbilical cord blood and amniotic fluid donated by pregnant women.

He won't recommend research on embryonic stem cells because too many people oppose destroying human embryos to obtain the cells.

"I know it gives angst for some. I think we can do it in a way that doesn't cause that kind of angst," Crist said at The Associated Press Florida Legislative Planning Session, a meeting of newspaper editors.

"I'm pragmatic ... I want to be respectful of concerns that they might have," said Crist, a Republican. "I also want to make progress."

The hallmark of human embryonic stem cells, which are created in the first days after conception, is the ability to turn into any of the more than 220 cell types that make up the human body. Researchers are hopeful they can train these primordial cells to repair damaged organs in need of healthy cells.

However, many people, including President Bush, oppose the destruction of embryos for any reason. The Bush administration has restricted federal funding for the embryo work since 2001, leading many scientists to search for alternative stem cell sources.

New Jersey in December agreed to spend millions of dollars on stem cell research, joining California, Connecticut, Illinois and Maryland in providing state funds in the field.

Researchers reported earlier this year that stem cells from amniotic fluid donated by pregnant women hold much the same promise as embryonic stem cells. But they cautioned that the research was early and said the use of embryonic cells in studies should continue.

Critics say Crist's \$20 million plan would replicate, on a smaller scale, the federal government's spending of hundreds of millions of dollars on non-embryonic research.

"It provides very limited funding for something the federal government already funds," said Bernard Siegel, director of the Genetics Policy Institute.