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Stumping for stem cells

Posted by [Catherine Magill](#)

[Entry posted at 14th June 2006 02:35 AM GMT]


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The [California stem cell policy and advocacy juggernaut](#) was in full steam this weekend at Stanford University. The two-day [Stem Cell Policy and Advocacy Summit II: Empowering the Pro-Cures Coalition](#) offered a banquet of the usual servings, including scientific updates, discussions of [ethics](#) and legal issues, and how-to primers on grassroots advocacy. There was some different fare, however:


-- A variety of nationwide polls (e.g., [Center for the Advancement of Medical Research](#) and [The Genetics and Public Policy Institute](#)) reported that the public supports somatic cell nuclear transfer by approximately 65-70%. That should be good news, but instead Governor Jim Doyle (Wis.) and others said this is evidence of the focus, organization and powerful voice of the 25% opposing it, and should be a rallying cry for supporters. Proposals to counter this force included opening up laboratories for visitation by the public on a monthly or quarterly basis to educate the public on their research.

-- The public's lack of understanding of the science behind the research was highlighted during a talk by Stephen Levick, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, on Sunday when he noted that Irv Weissman had recently asked several people to draw a picture of a blastocyst; each of the respondents drew a fetus.

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-- Bob Klein, chairman of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine and a major force behind California's Prop. 71, claimed that even minor overall savings that are foreseen to arise from human embryonic stem cell research applied to **better treatments for chronic diseases** could save significant amounts of money within the US health care system. By his calculations, a 2% cost savings in 6 out of 70 conditions thought to be good targets for therapies from the research would result in a 200% payback on California's Proposition 71 investment. For context, Klein pointed out that \$100 billion was saved in the costs of housing of polio victims after Jonas Salk developed the polio vaccine in 1952 and after the first successful big trial of the vaccine in 1955.

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