AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

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Stem Cell Research

Position

The American Nurses Association (ANA) supports the ethical use of stem cells for research and therapeutic purposes that impact health.

Background

In 1998 a scientist at the University of Wisconsin published a report that described the establishment of a human embryonic cell line created from the successful removal of cells from unused embryos at a fertility clinic. This and other cell lines developed in the same way can be used for important healthcare research. While similar research can be done with adult stem cells, adult cells have not produced the full range of cell types that embryonic cells produce. Stem cells have the ability to divide and to transform into specialized cells. Human embryos that remain frozen and unused after in-vitro fertilization represent one of the most promising sources of embryonic stem cells. If these embryos are donated and used for stem cell research they may contribute to alleviating suffering and enhancing quality of life instead of remaining frozen or being discarded.

In 2001, President Bush announced that federal funds could only be used to support research using human embryonic stem cells lines that were derived before that date. The NIH Human Embryonic Stem Cell Registry currently lists about 21 embryonic stem cell lines. New and vigorous cell lines must be obtained to have appropriate samples, representing the diversity of our population, available for research.

ANA recognizes that stem cell research raises significant ethical considerations. ANA supports federal funding of stem cell research conducted within strict scientific and ethical guidelines, and believes that this funding should be free of conditions that may unnecessarily impede its progress and achievements. ANA also supports the ethical use of somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT or "therapeutic cloning") and rejects the use of stem cell technology, or any technology, for the purposes of reproductive cloning.

While ANA recognizes there are opposing views on stem cell research, we believe the benefits to be realized for the many individuals who suffer from diseases and disabilities outweigh this dissent. Stem cell research is helping us understand fundamental cellular specialization and the application of that understanding.

Rationale

Stem cell research will have a significant impact on health and quality of life. Research and therapeutic processes use adult, fetal and embryonic stem cells to explore the possibilities of growing new organs and tissues to replace those that are damaged or diseased. Collectively, these sources promise to achieve research goals and to develop new therapies. ANA recognizes the potential for stem cell research to provide relief through prevention, diagnosis and/or treatment for patients with a wide variety of complex diseases.