

# Ethical issues in stem cell research and treatment

Jeremy Sugarman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics, Baltimore, Maryland, USA*

The incredible promise of stem cell research to at minimum advance scientific understanding and perhaps ultimately to treat persons with devastating diseases gives moral force to efforts to conduct this research. However, stem cell research has been riddled with ethical questions, in part because the predominant methods being used to derive or attempt to derive human embryonic stem cells require destruction of the embryo. Nevertheless, the ethical debates surrounding human embryonic stem cell research have not been solely related to those associated with the embryo. For instance, the creation of chimeras in some stem cell research has elicited concerns. Oocyte harvesting, which is essential to the creation of human embryonic stem cells raises concerns related to safety of the donor. Other important ethical issues relate to informed consent of both donors of gametes and embryos as well as recipients of stem cells and stem cell products. Further, there has been some concern related to the commercialization of the process, justice, and the responsible conduct of research. In addressing the ethical issues associated with human embryonic stem cell research, it is important to note that they are being deliberated in a setting where scientific excitement is high, there are extraordinarily powerful arguments for access to investigational treatments, and the financial, moral and political stakes are great. In an attempt to minimize the ethical issues associated with human embryonic stem cell research so important research can proceed, professional groups have issued guidelines for the ethical conduct of this research and its oversight. Systematic data regarding these efforts should be collected in order to enhance the likelihood that they meet their ethical goals.

*Cell Research* (2008) 18:s176. doi: 10.1038/cr.2008.266; published online 4 August 2008

Correspondence: Jeremy Sugarman

Jeremy Sugarman, MD, MPH, MA is the Harvey M. Meyerhoff Professor of Bioethics and Medicine, Professor of Medicine, Professor of Health Policy and Management, and Deputy Director for Medicine of the Berman Institute of Bioethics at the Johns Hopkins University. Dr Sugarman served as Senior Policy and Research Analyst for the White House Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments. Dr Sugarman continues to conduct both theoretical and empirical research in

medical ethics, concentrating on informed consent, research ethics, and the ethical issues associated with emerging technologies. Dr Sugarman serves on the Scientific and Research Advisory Board for the Canadian Blood Service and the Maryland Stem Cell Research Commission. He is currently Chair for the Ethics Working Group of the HIV Prevention Trials Network, the Ethics Officer for the Resuscitation Outcomes Consortium, Co-Chair of the Johns Hopkins' Embryonic Stem Cell Oversight Committee, and a member of ISSCR Task Force on Clinical Trials.