Interfaith Religious Group: Muslim

Dear Muslim Stakeholder Group,

We are the National Committee on Embryonic Stem Cell Research. We have been given the responsibility of drafting legislation for our beloved country Adanac. Your group has been identified as having a particular interest in our country's ongoing embryonic stem cell debate, and we would very much like to hear from you.

We invite you to share your opinions on the following four issues:

- The use of embryonic stem cells from existing stem cell lines;
- The use of embryonic stem cells from discarded embryos from *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) clinics;
- The use of embryonic stem cells from embryos created by IVF solely for research; and
- The use of embryonic stem cells from embryos created by therapeutic cloning.

Instead of incorporating the views of four religious perspectives (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Protestant) into one position, we suggest that different members present each religion separately.

As you may or may not be aware, there are three legal possibilities for these activities. Under Adanac's constitution, an activity is either unrestricted, controlled (and must fulfill certain criteria in order to occur) or outright prohibited. For activities that you believe should be prohibited or controlled, please suggest an appropriate punishment. For controlled activities, describe the criteria the activity must meet before being granted permission. For example, a common view is that discarded embryos from IVF clinics should be available for embryonic stem cell research only if the donors of the embryos have given their consent. This activity would be classified as "controlled," and the criteria would be "donor consent required". Please provide a rationale for all of your classifications.

TIMELINE

BETWEEN DAY 2 AND 3:
Read this letter and the articles in this package.
DAY 3:
Complete the worksheets and prepare your presentation.
DAY 4: Present your views to the Committee.

To help you create your presentation, we have compiled a package of documents that represents the views of similar groups in different countries for each of the four religions. These documents include speeches, press releases and articles. The package also contains a worksheet for each religion to help you identify the authors' stance. But be warned: you may run into conflicting views within this package. If this is the case, choose the view that you prefer.

Please begin your presentation by introducing yourself. We encourage you to be as persuasive and creative as possible – remember, your opinions are helping to create legislation we must all abide by.

We very much look forward to seeing you. By sharing your views, you are facilitating Adanac's legislative process and making a valuable contribution to the future of embryonic stem cell research in our country.

Sincerely,

National Committee on Embryonic Stem Cell Research

	ISLAMIC INSTITUTE "A Muslim Perspective on Embryonic Stem Cell Research"	**ISLAMONLINE.NET** "Federal Funding for Stem Cell Research?"
Whose point of view is expressed in this document?		
What is their role in society?		
Position on use of embryonic stem cells from existing cell lines		
Position on use of embryonic stem cells from discarded embryos from IVF clinics		
Position on use of embryonic stem cells from embryos created by IVF for research		
Position on use of embryonic stem cells created by therapeutic cloning		

IISSUES

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A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE ON EMBRYONIC STEM-CELL RESEARCH

A majority of Muslim Americans support embryonic stem-cell research according to a new poll conducted by the Islamic Institute. The Washington-based Islamic advocacy group also announced its support for the research based on the recommendations of a panel of Islamic scholars, scientists, and medical doctors.

According to the Islamic Institute's poll of 629 individuals, 62% (394) stated their overall support for research on human embryos. 73% (457) stated that it is acceptable to use embryos that have already been donated from in-vitro fertilization procedures, while 61% (383) stated their support for using embryos to be donated in the future.

49% (312) of the respondents feel it is acceptable to produce embryos specifically for stem-cell research purposes, and 69% (433) believe the federal government should fund embryonic stem-cell research. However, when asked if they accept President Bush's plan to fund limited stem-cell research on existing stem-cell lines, 68% (425) agreed, reflecting a national trend to accept the President's position as an acceptable middle ground.

44% (275) of the respondents stated that they have often followed the news regarding stem-cell research, while 53% (335) stated they followed the news occasionally. All figures are based on responses to a list of 10 questions submitted by the Islamic Institute to members of the community and does not necessarily constitute a scientific statistical sample.

Research on embryonic stem cells is one of the most promising, yet controversial scientific opportunities of our time. This research offers the potential development of treatments for Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, spinal cord injuries, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, and so many other fatal diseases. At the same time, due to the nature of this research, there is a great potential for abuse and misuse that must be taken into consideration. Stem-cell research raises serious ethical, theological, and philosophical questions and challenges, which the Muslim American community must address.

Historically, Islam has dealt with issues that confront the community and become of critical importance, by allowing for ijtihad. Ijtihad is the principle where qualified Islamic scholars reach an opinion, through research and deliberation, which conforms with the comprehensive Islamic view of the universe and life. The opinion also takes into account the benefit of humanity and protecting it from corruption, and follows the purposes of Islamic jurisprudence of providing for man's needs and necessities as well as his development.

In an effort to formulate a policy position on embryonic stem-cell research, and to ensure Muslim American participation in the debate of this ethical and scientific issue, the Islamic Institute convened a panel of experts, in cooperation with the Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA, North American council of Islamic jurisprudence), the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS), and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). The panel, consisting of medical doctors, scientists, and Islamic scholars, deliberated all aspects of this topic at length, in order to develop an Islamic perspective on stem-cell research. The panel included:

- Dr. Taha J. Al-Alawani, President, Fiqh Council of North America
- Dr. Jamal Barzinji, Vice President, International Institute of Islamic Thought
- Dr. Eltigani A. Hamid, Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences
- Dr. Hisham Altalib, Director, International Institute of Islamic Thought
- Dr. Jamil Fayez, Professor Emeritus, Wake Forest University Medical School, infertility and reproductive endocrinology specialist
- Mutahhar Fauzia, M.D., OB/GYN, infertility specialist
- Mohammad Jaghlit, M.D.

Though the issue is hard and extremely emotional, our opinion is based on all available scientific facts at this time, as well as full adherence to Islamic teachings.

Muslims have strongly rejected human cloning experimentation that "contradicts Islamic legislation and is prohibited in all its forms because it contradicts with Islam." (See edict of the Mufti of Egypt on ArabicNews.com) Nevertheless, virtually all Muslim scholars see in-vitro fertilization (IVF) as a compassionate and humane scientific procedure to help infertile couples bear children. This procedure involves stimulating a woman's ovaries, removing the eggs, and fertilizing them by sperm cells from the husband in the laboratory. Days-old fertilized eggs (embryos) are implanted in the woman's uterus for normal pregnancy. IVF, Islamic scholars emphasize, has to be performed under strict guidelines, not the least of which is that the fertilization has to be of a sperm and an egg of a properly married couple.

Scientists assure us that it is inevitable and also desirable to produce several embryos to give the woman a better chance of getting pregnant. The "spare" embryos that result from IVF procedures are either frozen or destroyed. Scientists have discovered that the stem cells of these embryos have the potential to develop and differentiate into any of the 200-plus kinds of cells in the human body.

The Islamic Institute supports stem-cell research on these spare embryos from in-vitro fertilization. Under the Islamic principle of the "purposes and higher causes of the shariiah (Islamic law)", we believe it is a societal obligation to perform research on these extra embryos instead of discarding them. Thousands of embryos that would be otherwise discarded every year in fertility clinics could potentially be

Source: Islamic Institute
www.islamicinstitute.org/i3-stemcell.pdf

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR STEM CELL RESEARCH?

By Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, Ph.D.
Minaret of Freedom Institute

08/08/2001

The debate over funding and regulation of stem cell research has grabbed the headlines. But, in actuality, it is really a small sub-issue in the broader field of medical ethics, becoming a proxy battle over the issue of abortion, when it should really be a take-off point for a discussion of how one balances other cherished values against the value of promoting - even saving - lives in the future.

The first thing we must acknowledge before even starting the debate is that benefits from stem cell research will come some time in the future. It may be decades before we see practical commercial applications that will help victims of Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, and strokes, or before we see the disabled gain the ability to get out of their wheelchairs and walk (although when it comes to scientific progress, things usually come to fruition far sooner than most people guess).

So what is a stem cell? "A stem cell is any cell that can give rise to more than one kind of cell." The easiest way to obtain such cells is from human embryos, that is, fetal tissue that has not yet differentiated. Cells in that state would eventually develop into differentiated cells appropriate to the creation of different organs of the human body. It is their versatility for which they are prized.

But what moral issues rise from this research?

The main issue has been the question of whether it is morally permissible to use embryo material for purposes other than that of gestation into human beings. The entire pro-life movement, but especially the Catholic Church and Evangelical Christians, have become concerned about the perceived link to abortion, because they believe such research poses the risk of encouraging women to have abortions in order to provide stem cells. Worse yet, some women may decide to get pregnant specifically so that the embryo may be aborted to harvest stem cells.

Are moral issues inherent to the nature of the research?

The simple fact is that they are not. Even the bill that was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives last week (H.R. 2505) was really a ban on human cloning. It did, however, make no exception for therapeutic cloning, that is, the extraction of stem cells from cloned embryos. Thus, the debate was expanded to include a debate on the issue of stem cell research. In particular, the question is being debated on whether federal funds should be used to support stem cell research. The National Institute of Health's (NIH) guidelines in the United States specifically forbid the creation of embryos for research purposes, while the British government has announced a policy permitting the practice (Bailey, 2000).

For Muslims the debates that drive Catholic and Evangelical concerns are not pertinent. Ensoulment, the moment at which a fetus receives a soul, according to the Qur'an and sunnah (way of the Prophet Mohammad [SAW]), does not occur until the fourth month of pregnancy. Thus, the use of embryonic stem cells, in itself, does not violate Islamic law. Even if the termination of a pregnancy is involved, there can be no question that the dictum "abortion is murder" can be applied, since the embryo is not a person. Nonetheless, the question of whether the creation of an embryo by a husband and wife specifically for the purpose of creating stem cells for the medical treatment of the couple or their children, or other relatives, should be prohibited, remains controversial in Muslim circles. Bill Broadway (2001) quotes Hassan Hathout of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences in Kuwait to the effect that "Islam opposes creating embryos with the intention of using them for research."

Fortunately, ethical dilemmas by which pundits sell newspapers and politicians scramble for votes, are not central to the future of stem cell research. Embryos may be the easiest way to obtain stem cells, but they are not the only way. A number of important breakthroughs in animal studies have already been achieved in stem cell research; these progresses would not entail recourse to embryonic sources, or other products requiring abortion. Adult stem cells, or stem cells from umbilical cords, have provided the material with which scientists have engaged in major research in Italian organ transplant studies; in the University of South Florida's stroke research into the alleviation of stroke symptoms; in the creation of heart tissue by the people who cloned "Dolly" the sheep; and in HIV-related research at Enzio Biochem, Inc. In other words, Allah, in his bounty, always opens more doors than He closes.

The fact is that those who complain that federal funding of stem cell research is necessary because commercial institutions won't fund research on their own, miss the fundamental point of economic calculation. If the market decides that funding of research through halal (Islamically permissible) means cannot be economically justified, then perhaps the market is telling us that the costs outweigh the benefits. To try to solve this "problem" by injecting government money, especially when some taxpayers have religious objections as to how their money shall be used, is to assert that politicians are better arbiters of how to balance the morality of protecting the weak (e.g., embryos) against advancing the quality of life for the rest of society. Politicians, however, are notoriously the most shortsighted members of society, generally incapable of seeing beyond the next election.

If subsidies are required for this kind of research, let it be through the vehicle of research universities, or the establishment of dedicated research foundations funded by those whose values reflect the missions of the institutions. In classical Islamic society, we had such institutions. They were called awqâf.

References

Bailey, Ronald 2000. "Getting On With It," Reason Online (08/24/2000)

Broadway, Bill 2001. "Faith Is a Force On Both Sides of Stem Cell Debate: Religious Communities Split Sharply On Permitting Embryonic Research," Washington Post (08/4/2001) B9.

Source: IslamOnline.net
http://198.65.147.194/english/Views/2001/08/article6.shtml

PRESENTATION GUIDE: ☪MUSLIM

This table contains all of the topics that must be included in your presentation to the Committee. Use this table to record your proposals.

When presenting your proposals to the committee be as creative as possible. In other words, do not simply present this table.

ACTIVITY	LEGAL STATUS (prohibited, controlled or unrestricted)	CRITERIA (only for controlled activities)	PUNISHMENT (only for prohibited or controlled activities)	REASON (for all)
Use of embryonic stem cells from existing cell lines				
Use of embryonic stem cells from discarded embryos from IVF clinics				
Use of embryonic stem cells from embryos created by IVF for research				
Use of embryonic stem cells from embryos created by therapeutic cloning				