DO NO HARM
The Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics

"As to diseases ,make a habit of two things —
to help, or at least *do no harm*."
— Hippocrates, *The Epidemics* —

Misleading, or an Inconvenient Truth?

Do No Harm is disappointed to see a new low in scientific publishing with Science's June 13 online posting of a Letter to the Editor that is a transparent personal attack on Dr. David Prentice, a founding member of Do No Harm.

The Letter purports to analyze Do No Harm's list of adult stem cell treatments, which lists diseases and conditions in which human patients have benefited from stem cell treatments and provides peer-reviewed references on these trials. Do No Harm clearly states that these are simply cases where adult stem cells have shown "benefits to human patients", have produced "therapeutic benefit to human patients"; Dr. Prentice is quoted here as saying that adult stem cells have "helped patients."

But the authors of the Letter engage in semantic gymnastics, creating a straw man so they can knock it down and then claim they have discredited Do No Harm. They twist our statements into claims that these treatments all currently provide a "cure," are "generally available," or are "fully tested in all required phases of clinical trails and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration." (Such a claim would have been ridiculous, in part because some dramatic advances have occurred in other countries where FDA approval is not a relevant factor.)

Regarding two diseases, the Letter implies that the list cites only one peer-reviewed reference and does so inaccurately. However, the Letter's supplement acknowledges an additional four references showing "improved long-term survival" for patients receiving adult stem cells.

Do No Harm thanks the Letter's authors for pointing out some references that were inadvertently included, as well as some new references to include, so the list could be properly updated. Dr. Prentice is submitting a formal response to *Science*, and we hope the journal will belatedly give him the courtesy of a published reply. This courtesy is normally accorded by prior notice, and simultaneous publication of the response with an original Letter of this nature.

That the authors of the Letter should bring up the subject of FDA-approved clinical trials is especially odd, because the federal government documents a great number of current trials using adult stem cells at various phases of investigation. A check of ClinicalTrials.gov shows 565 such trials currently active and recruiting patients, and a total of 1170 trials in all (including trials that no longer need to recruit more patients). There are no human trials of embryonic stem cells, and there never have been. Nor are there any peer-reviewed references for human treatments with embryonic stem cells, because animal trials have yet to show that embryonic stem cells are safe or effective enough to initiate even Phase I human trials for any condition.

It remains absolutely true that adult stem cells have benefited patients suffering from at least 72 diseases and conditions, where patient improvement is documented by peer-reviewed scientific publications. There are likely others, undoubtedly more to come, and many more accounts of people who have benefited from such research. That is the real success of adult stem cells, helping human patients. It is a success that no one can claim for embryonic stem cells.

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