

Press Conference with Heal Without Harm Ethical Research Coalition

SB 423 & SB 424

October 24, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We are scientists with extensive training and experience in biomedical research. Our remarks here today express our personal position and do not represent the views or opinions of any employer or affiliated institution.

Fact #1: There have been *no* cures developed that *require* aborted fetal body parts. This was recently confirmed by the US House Select Investigative Panel after a yearlong investigation, which uncovered evidence on the trafficking of human fetal body parts for research.¹ Scientists who support using aborted fetal body parts claim that they are “essential to the prevention and treatment of life-threatening disease” because they are the “gold-standard resource...into how human tissues and organs develop”². Yet, the numbers defy these claims in the state of Wisconsin and nationwide. Even Dr. Lawrence Goldstein, Professor and Director of the UC San Diego Stem Cell Program, who testified on behalf of those who use fetal tissue, admitted that he is “not aware of any [therapies] that have been definitely solved using fetal tissue.”³

Let’s set the record straight. While some vaccines have used cells derived from aborted fetal tissue at various points in the development process, this has NEVER been the exclusive means necessary for these breakthroughs. None of the 75 vaccines available in the US are produced using fresh fetal tissue. Although a small number (11) still use cell “lines” derived from aborted fetal tissue (WI-38 and MRC-5),⁴ there are no scientific reasons requiring this. The reality is that no current treatments or therapies exist that *require* harvesting fetal body parts from today’s abortions.

Fact #2: Aborted fetal body parts are *not* critical for research or medical advancements. Restricting the use of aborted fetal body parts will not bring research and clinical trials to a halt. First, these bills will not stop *any* research using embryonic stem cells or cell lines derived from aborted fetal tissue before January 1, 2017. Second, research using aborted fetal body parts is making a negligible contribution to science. In a recent five-year period (2010-2014), only 0.2% of grants funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and only 0.01% of clinical trials use fetal tissue.¹ Similar numbers are seen at UW Madison, where a mere 0.1-0.4% of current NIH research funding supports research using human fetal tissue.⁵ Instead, over 99% of NIH funds awarded to UW Madison support research using noncontroversial methods and models to study several diseases including Zika, complications of pregnancy, and cancer.

Fact #3: Ethically-derived tissue sources are available to researchers and are saving lives *today!* Tissue resources and banks already exist in the state of Wisconsin that provide investigators with valuable discarded human tissue samples donated by patients, such as placenta, cord blood, and various tissues from surgeries and biopsies.⁶ Human cadavers are another valuable tissue source, from which stem cells can be isolated up to several weeks after death.⁷ Scientists can also “reprogram” adult somatic cells (such as skin cells) to make induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells) that possess an embryonic-like state.⁸ Cord blood and iPS cells can then be used to form “organoids,” which are 3D cellular clusters replicating normal organ function *in vitro*.^{9,10}

And let's not forget about adult stem cells, which have saved the lives of over 1 million people worldwide,^{11,12} but not one person is alive today because of stem cells from aborted fetal body parts. Wisconsin is at the forefront of adult stem cell therapy, with impressive programs at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, where earlier this year the first patient in an innovative clinical trial received treatment for heart failure using the patient's own stem cells.¹³

Finally, Wisconsin should invest in making ethically-derived fetal tissue available to researchers. For those who claim that fetal tissue is more suitable for their research than any of the alternative materials, donations from miscarriages or stillbirth are a useful and ethical solution. Miscarriage tissue is not readily available commercially like aborted fetal body parts. This is why Senate Bill 424 creates an opportunity for (1) parents to be informed regarding the donation of their child's remains to research as an anatomical gift and (2) a study to determine the feasibility of developing a fetal tissue bank, which could include a mechanism for obtaining tissue from early miscarriages in a timely manner. Several papers have been published, which outline very clearly that spontaneous miscarriages can be a useful and ethical alternative source of fetal tissue and stem cells, when collected and preserved properly¹⁴⁻¹⁸.

In conclusion, we applaud the Heal without Harm Coalition and Wisconsin legislature for bringing these bills forward. They send a strong message that Wisconsin supports the best science without ethical compromise. We urge those that stand in opposition, do not be deceived by the many false and misleading assertions regarding the "need" for aborted fetal body parts in research and medicine. Prohibiting the use of aborted fetal body parts in this state would guarantee professionals and patients in Wisconsin safe and ethically sound cures that have the *real* promise of healing patients now and in the future.

Respectfully,

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