

Stem Cells: Science, Policy and Ethics

Gerald D. Fischbach, MD
Executive VP for Health and Biomedical Sciences
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September 23, 2003
4:00 pm-5:30 pm

Alumni Auditorium
College of Physicians & Surgeons
630 W. 168th St.
New York, NY 10032

On September 23, 2003, Dr. Fischbach presented *Stem Cells: Science, Policy and Ethics* in the Alumni Auditorium of the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. According to Dr. Fischbach, stem cell technology has the potential to eliminate an enormous amount of suffering; he has seen few technologies as promising. For example, in the mouse, stem cells show "extraordinary promise" for treating spinal cord injury and hold future promise for the treatment of Parkinson's disease and diabetes.

Dr. Fischbach explained that President Bush's decision, on August 9, 2001, to limit the use of federal funds to be used for research on 60 existing stem cell lines, has had an "enormous impact on the way we conduct science." Unfortunately, only eleven of those lines are currently viable and of those eleven, eight are the property of biotech companies. He believes that more studies of embryonic stem cells are needed, that the 20 million dollars currently spent on existing cell lines by the NIH is "not enough."

In order to win the public trust, Dr. Fischbach feels that it is important to accurately communicate, particularly to the public, the meaning of the various terms used, such as blastocyst, and embryo. He thinks that an informed public will help to increase funding for stem cell research. He does not believe that therapeutic cloning will lead to reproductive cloning, and he considers reproductive cloning "scientifically unsound and morally reprehensible."

Dr. Fischbach advocates going forward with stem cell research in order to fully understand its potential and promise, and hopes that Columbia will be in the forefront of stem cell research.