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Embryonic Stem Cell Research:

“Miracle” Cures, or Decades of Basic Research?

“Major roadblocks remain before human embryonic stem cells could be transplanted into humans to cure diseases or replace injured body parts, a research pioneer said Thursday night. University of Wisconsin scientist James Thomson said obstacles include learning how to grow the cells into all types of organs and tissue and then making sure cancer and other defects are not introduced during the transplantation. ‘I don’t want to sound too pessimistic because this is all doable, but it’s going to be very hard,’ Thomson told the Wisconsin Newspaper Association’s annual convention at the Kalahari Resort in this Wisconsin Dells town. ‘Ultimately, those transplantation therapies should work but it’s likely to take a long time.’... Thomson cautioned such breakthroughs **are likely decades away.**”

- Associated Press reporter Ryan J. Foley, “Stem cell pioneer warns of roadblocks before cures,” *San Jose Mercury News Online*, posted Feb. 8, 2007, www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/16656570.htm

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“Much of the California electorate was sold last year on the idea that human embryonic stem cells might be turned into amazing cures for incurable diseases, propelling Proposition 71 to easy victory in the Nov. 2004 election. Now, it’s increasingly clear that stem cell transplants for diabetes or Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s are nowhere close, **maybe decades away.**”

- Science writer Carl T. Hall, “Stem Cell leaders to talk strategy at conference,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Sept. 30, 2005, page B4

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“One of the problems is that in order to persuade the public that we must do this work, we often go rather too far in promising what we might achieve... I am not entirely convinced that embryonic stem cells will, **in my lifetime, and possibly anybody’s lifetime for that matter**, be holding quite the promise that we desperately hope they will.”

- British stem cell expert Professor Lord Winston, Lecture at Gresham College, June 20, 2005, www.gresham.ac.uk/printtranscript.asp?EventId=347

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“[I]t is necessary that prospective donors recognize the large gap between research and therapy... [R]esearchers must make every effort to communicate to these volunteers that it is extremely unlikely that their contributions will directly benefit themselves or their loved ones. Also, **it is nearly certain that the clinical benefits of the research are years or maybe decades away.** This is a message that desperate families and patients will not want to hear.”

- David Magnus and Mildred K. Cho of Stanford University, "Issues in Oocyte Donation for Stem Cell Research," *Science*, 17 June 2005, p. 1748

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"[R]esearchers say it could be **decades** before embryonic stem cells cure anything."

- Helen Fields, "Reigniting the Stem Cell Debate," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 6, 2005, www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050606/6politics.b1.htm

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"I want to make a basic statement first — which almost never gets in the press, but I keep trying — on what I see as the legacy of these cells.

"One is the basic science, and simply having better access to the human body. That's the most important legacy. I'm very hopeful that there will be some transplantation applications for this technology, but they're going to be very challenging. And it's been so hyped in the press that people expect it to come the day after tomorrow. ...

"**Ten or 20 years from now**, I'm actually currently optimistic that there will be transplantation-based therapies, but even if there was none, and it was a complete failure, this technology is extraordinarily important."

- University of Wisconsin stem cell expert James Thomson, in Alan Boyle, "Stem cell pioneer does a reality check," MSNBC, June 25, 2005, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8303756/

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"Gone are the allusions to healing such afflictions as spinal cord injuries and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases that dominated the 2004 campaign for Proposition 71. In fact, scientists say, **there is no guarantee of cures -- certainly not any time soon** -- from the measure that was optimistically titled the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act...the draft plan is clear: **'It is unlikely that [the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine] will be able to fully develop stem cell therapy for routine clinical use during the 10 years of the plan.'** Instead, the top goal is to establish, in principle, that a therapy developed from human embryonic stem cells can 'restore function for at least one disease.'"

-Mary Engel, "Reality Check for Stem Cell Optimism," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2006, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-stemcell3dec03,1,707176.story?page=2>

(all emphases in boldface added)

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2/21/07