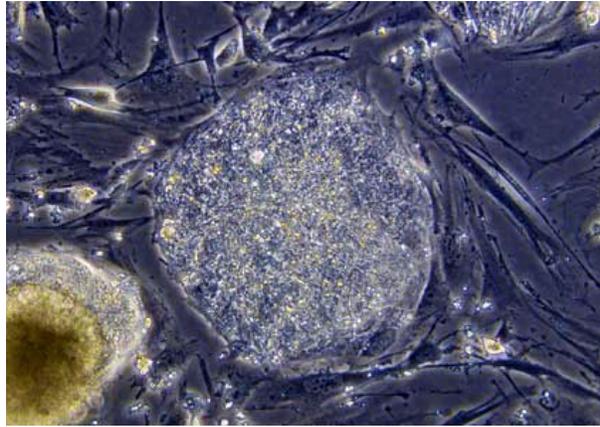


Stem Cells: Promises to Keep?

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Samantha watched as the drop of water on the tip of the icicle finally plummeted to the ground below as a brisk wind disturbed its equilibrium. She shivered as she turned away from the wintry landscape outside, but then immediately smiled as her gaze came to rest upon her pre-school twins Anna and Mark dozing in front of a Disney movie. Samantha felt doubly blessed to have these two kids. She and her husband Brad had tried for over 10 years to have children before they turned to Dr. Billings for help. Anna and Mark had been conceived with the help of IVF treatments. Samantha laughed softly, thinking of all the adjustments they had made after the arrival of the twins. No more quiet dinners or lazy Sundays for years to come, she thought to herself, not altogether unhappily.

Samantha clicked the remote, switching from *The Lion King* to PBS. A few minutes later she heard the back door open and her husband Brad calling out, “Hey, Sam!” as he came in from the cold, stomping the snow off of his boots.

“Shh,” said Samantha, seeing Anna stir in her sleep. “The twins just dozed off. It’s the first minute of peace I’ve had all day.” She rose from the couch and gave him a quick hug.

“I’m so glad to be home. Work is starting to drive me nuts. They want us to do more and more in less and less time. And then, to top it off, I hit a major traffic jam on the Loop. I’m sorry I’m late again.” Brad looked into Samantha’s eyes to make sure she wasn’t upset.

“No problem ... gotta pay the bills, right? Come and sit with me. There’s an interesting show on PBS that just came on,” said Samantha, settling back down on the couch and patting the cushion next to her.

Brad sat down and Sam rested her head on his shoulder. The PBS program was about stem cells and their potential medical uses. Brad looked over at Samantha as the show went on. She seemed very engrossed by the story. Occasionally she would smile and nod her head. Out of the corner of her eye, Samantha noted that Brad had a frown on his face through most of the show. Maybe he was still upset about work. A half-hour later, the program ended. Samantha stood up to stretch and then turned to Brad with a big smile.

“Wasn’t that fantastic? Look at all the things that stem cells could be used for. They might be able to help people with Parkinson’s disease or even heart attacks. It’s amazing what scientists are coming up with these days. I’d like to help out. We still have those embryos frozen away at the clinic from back when we were doing the IVF treatments. I wonder if we could donate them?” Samantha mused.

“Are you nuts?” Brad scowled. “Didn’t you get the gist of that show? They are destroying babies to get those stem cells. And you want to give them our children!”

“Our children? Our children are sleeping right here in this room. I’m talking about some clumps of cells that we will never use. We’ve talked about this before, Brad. We decided that Anna and Mark are enough. We aren’t planning to have any more kids, especially since I’m going back to work soon. Why not put those cells to good use? There are so many people who are suffering who could benefit from them. Didn’t your Aunt Regina die from diabetes complications last year? People like her might have a chance for a better life through the use of stem cells. My cousin Jackie, who was paralyzed in that car accident, might be able to walk again! In fact, our own children might benefit from those cells someday.”

Brad stood up and faced Sam. “That may be true, but at what cost? Those are human beings we’re talking about, not just ‘clumps of cells.’ I don’t understand, Sam. You have always had pro-life beliefs like me. Those are our babies that you’re talking about destroying!”

“But we’re not going to use those embryos to create children, Brad. You’ve said yourself you don’t want any more children. What are you going to do? Leave them frozen forever?” cried Sam.

“I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about it much until you brought this up. Maybe we can donate them to another infertile couple. Can we do that? Besides, they said in the show that at this point in time the government won’t fund any new research that destroys embryos to make cell lines. The only embryonic stem cell lines that can be used in federally funded research are those that were already created before the government came to that decision, so you probably couldn’t donate our embryos to science anyway.”

“Maybe so,” Sam said softly. “All I know is that I want to do the right thing. If we aren’t able to donate our embryos and we’re not going to use them to have more children, what should we do with them?”

“I don’t know,” sighed Brad. They both looked away from each other and out at the windswept landscape outside.

Image Credit: Microscopic 20x view of a colony of undifferentiated human embryonic stems cells. [Photo](#) used with permission, courtesy of University of Wisconsin Board of Regents.

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