



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

HCR 89/HR 66

Requesting the John A. Burns School of Medicine to establish and head a task group to review issues related to stem cell research.

and

HCR 100/HR 75

Requesting the University of Hawaii to conduct a study and propose recommendations relating to the feasibility of stem cell research for Hawaii.

Testimony Presented Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

March 29, 2005

by

T. Samuel Shomaker, MD, JD
Acting Dean
John A. Burns School of Medicine
University of Hawaii at Manoa

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March 29, 2005
State Capitol, Conference Room 309, 2:00 p.m.

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HCR 89/HR 66 and HCR 100/HR 75

Chairs Waters and Arakaki, Vice Chairs Shimabukuro and Green and Committee members.

It is the opinion of the John A. Burns School of Medicine that the study that the Legislature is requesting in this measure is both timely and warranted. As mentioned before in previous testimony on related bills, we consider that the State of Hawaii has a unique opportunity to make significant discoveries in the field of human stem cell research because one of our leading researchers, Dr. Ryuzo Yanagimachi, spent his entire career developing the basic techniques that are used in this new science. This includes the technique of nuclear transfer, in which an individual's genetic material can potentially be harnessed to create new organs.

However, there are many obstacles to overcome before such research can be conducted in this State. First, the largest source for medical research, NIH research grants, are not available for human stem cell research beyond a few cells lines that are limited in potential by federal decree. Thus, the State must develop a funding source that does not currently exist, and this type of research is expensive. This can be done, but it will require a momentum driven by wide public support.

Second, there is significant disagreement among the citizens of the U.S. as to how to best conduct human embryonic stem cell research, or whether to do it at all.

Third, because of the ban on using federal funds for human embryonic stem cell research stringent policies would have to be established to separate all areas of medical research from any human embryonic stem cell research that would be conducted at the university.

For these reasons, we consider it important to establish this task force. We recommend that it include physicians, basic scientists, and representatives from the fields of law, ethics, and religious leaders. If the State of Hawaii decides to encourage human embryonic stem cell research, it must also thoroughly examine all the issues surrounding it and try to reach a consensus. We encourage the Legislature to begin the public debate on this important question by establishing the proposed commission. If the Legislature acts JABSOM will play the role envisioned for it by HCRs 89 and 100.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.