

## Genetics and Public Policy Center

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### **Statement of Kathy Hudson, Ph.D. Director, The Genetics and Public Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University**

#### **Re: New Research on Derivation of Embryonic Stem Cells**

(WASHINGTON, Oct. 16, 2005) -- This week, Nature will publish research by Robert Lanza at Advanced Cell Technology about new ways to produce stem cells without destroying the embryo, by extracting and using cells acquired through blastomere biopsy similar to the technique now used for preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). In response, Kathy Hudson, Ph.D., director of the Genetics and Public Policy Center at Johns Hopkins University, issued the following statement:

"Dr. Lanza's research certainly fuels hope for many who look for a way to produce embryonic stem cells without destroying the embryo. However, while this is certainly a significant scientific development, we need to be circumspect in our expectations for use of this technique in humans, and the Genetics and Public Policy Center will be calling this week for new tools to help scientists and society understand and track possible health consequences related to blastomere biopsy.

"At present we have only the murkiest picture of what risks human embryo biopsy might pose. Embryo biopsy currently is used as part of PGD to avoid the birth of a child with a genetic disease or condition. It is a completely different risk/benefit equation to ask a mother to undergo embryo biopsy in the name of scientific research, where neither she nor her baby stands to benefit directly.

"In fact, for the 2,000 births already produced with the aid of PGD, we have little data that documents the safety and efficacy of the procedure, or the long-term health of the children. For this reason, I am announcing this week at the American Society for Reproductive Medicine a new effort to create a PGD database in the United States to collect the data needed to answer these and other important scientific and clinical questions about the safety and efficacy of PGD. With the little we know today about health risks to the mother and child from blastomere biopsy, we should not look to this procedure in the near term as a true alternative source of embryonic stem cells.

"Clearly, important research such as Lanza's should help inform the public dialogue about embryonic stem cell research. Such dialogue, however, must include clear and equal attention to the possible risks."

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The Genetics and Public Policy Center is a part of the Phoebe R. Berman Bioethics Institute at The Johns Hopkins University and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The mission of the Genetics and Public Policy Center is to create the environment and tools needed by decision makers in both the private and public sectors to carefully consider and respond to the challenges and opportunities that arise from scientific advances in genetics. Visit [www.DNApolicy.org](http://www.DNApolicy.org) for more information.

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