

# Cancer Group In Controversy On Stem Cells



Save



Related Papers



Chat with paper

**By Nicholas Wade**

Sept. 10, 1999

See the article in its original context from September 10, 1999, Section A, Page 18    Buy Reprints

[VIEW ON TIMESMACHINE](#)

TimesMachine is an exclusive benefit for home delivery and digital subscribers.

The American Cancer Society is caught between a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and a Nobel laureate over the society's position on human embryonic stem cell research.

In July, the society, which receives \$500 million a year in public donations, withdrew from Patients' Cure, a consortium of advocacy groups formed to lobby Congress against banning federally financed research on human embryonic stem cells.

The opposite position is taken by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which objects to the stem cells' being derived from the surplus embryos created in fertility clinics. Biologists hope the cells will help repair damaged tissues in a wide variety of diseases.

The American Cancer Society withdrew from Patients' Cure after Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore wrote the society, urging it to reconsider its position, and a Catholic group canceled pledges for a cancer research fund-raiser. The society said

at the time that it withdrew because of a policy disagreement with Patients' Cure, not because of pressure from the church.

But the society's position drew a stinging rebuke from Dr. Paul Berg, who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1980. Dr. Berg wrote of his unhappiness to Dr. John Seffrin, chief executive officer of the cancer society, in a letter dated Aug. 27.

Dr. Berg, a Stanford University biologist, led scientists in 1975 in assessing another new research tool, the recombinant DNA technique, which gave researchers unprecedented flexibility in transferring genes from one organism to another.

Noting that he had devoted his professional life to basic research that might lead to cancer prevention, Dr. Berg said: "One can only contrast the society's full and courageous support for recombinant DNA research when that breakthrough occurred 25 years ago with the present timid and equivocal stance it has taken with regard to a potentially equally profound technology. Have politics and ideology taken precedence over science at the A.C.S.?"

On Wednesday, the cancer society released its response to Dr. Berg, a letter in which Dr. Seffrin wrote that the society was developing its own position on stem cell research and "must not be manipulated into prematurely favoring any particular point of view."

---

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 18 of the National edition with the headline: Cancer Group In Controversy On Stem Cells