

**Statement of Richard M. Doerflinger**  
**Associate Director for Policy Development**  
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**Re: ABC News poll on stem cell research**  
**June 27, 2001**

Last night ABC News released a biased and misleading poll claiming to show majority support for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

While ABC reported afterward that its poll was about embryonic stem cell research, the poll itself simply asked people whether they support “stem cell research.”

Of course, President Bush and pro-life lawmakers support stem cell research and other promising medical research. The real question before the President is whether to fund that part of stem cell research which requires destroying live human embryos. ABC did not ask *that* question.

For months, viewers of ABC News have seen reports of startling progress in use of *adult* stem cells to treat heart damage, transform into different cell types, and so on. This poll exploits interest in such morally acceptable research, to give an artificial boost of support to quite different research that is unethical and has never helped a single human patient.

Those surveyed were first given background “information” that was false and prejudicial:

- ABC told them that when embryos in fertility clinics (inaccurately called “fertilized eggs” by ABC) are in “excess” of parents’ current reproductive needs, the parents have the choice of discarding the embryos or donating them for research. In fact the parents generally have two other options: preserve the embryos for possible future use (chosen by about 90%), or donate them to another couple so they can have a child. The poll creates a false impression that for these embryos, the only alternative to being dissected for research is to be thrown away.

- ABC told them that some people support “stem cell research” because it holds potential for cures, while some oppose “stem cell research” because they oppose any “use” of embryos in research. This was confusing, to say the least. Why would opposition to use of embryos in research make someone oppose all stem cell research? In any case, Catholic teaching does not oppose all “use” of embryos in research (particularly research that may benefit that particular embryo), but opposes *destroying* human embryos for research. The poll never said that this is what is at stake.

A balanced poll would have pointed out what makes embryonic stem cell research so controversial. It also would have mentioned the alternative of increased funding for stem cell research based on other sources **B** research which is extremely promising and does not pose this terrible moral problem. When such points *are* mentioned, as in a recent poll commissioned by the Catholic bishops’ conference, public opposition to funding embryonic stem cell research is overwhelming.

See [www.nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/2001/01-101.htm](http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/2001/01-101.htm)