

Draft stem-cell guidelines still won't allow funds for cloning

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — The Obama administration clarified its policy on embryonic stem-cell research April 17, issuing draft guidelines that will expand federal funding for the controversial research but retaining a ban on funding for its most ethically fraught versions.

The [proposed guidelines](#), released by the [National Institutes of Health](#), are likely to enable a vast expansion of federally funded research on embryonic stem cells.

Scientists have studied embryonic stem cells for more than a decade because of their potential to become any one of more than 200 types of tissues in the human body. The research, scientists say, has the potential to produce treatments for a wide array of injuries and degenerative conditions that are disabling and even fatal.

President Obama shakes hands with Rep. Jim Langevin (D-R.I.), who was paralyzed at the age of 16, at the March 9 signing ceremony for his executive order on stem-cell research.

(PHOTO/White House)

However, such stem-cell research has proven highly controversial, because the embryos are destroyed in the process of harvesting the stem cells.

President Bush effectively banned federal funding for new embryonic stem-cell research shortly after he took office. But Obama, following a campaign promise, [signed](#) an executive order March 9 rescinding the Bush policy.

Nonetheless, Obama's [order](#) did not specifically address some of the more

practical concerns about exactly what kinds of research the government would fund. The NIH proposal — to be submitted to a public-input process and review period before being finalized in mid-summer — further fleshes out the administration's policies.

The new guidelines take a centrist approach, allowing funding only for research on surplus embryos from fertility treatments that parents have donated. The proposal continues to ban funding for research on embryos that were created specifically for research purposes.

The new guidelines would also continue to ban research on cloned embryos, which some scientists have argued is an important and necessary area of study. For certain diseases, they argue, the treatment — which clones an embryo from the patient being treated and uses its stem cells to grow replacement tissues — would prevent the patient's body from rejecting the tissues.

But many bioethicists have said such so-called “therapeutic cloning” is far too morally risky an endeavor, and public support for it lags far behind support for stem-cell research on surplus embryos from fertility treatments.

-Robert Marus is managing editor and Washington bureau chief for Associated Baptist Press.

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