

TESTIMONY REGARDING HB 861 (Walker Hines)
“Establishes an umbilical cord blood-banking program through the Department of Health and Hospitals”
House Health & Welfare Committee, April 9, 2008

Good Morning, Madam Chairman, and Ladies & Gentlemen of the Committee!

My name is Dr. W. A. Krotoski. I am a physician and currently retired medical scientist; I have lived in Louisiana since 1974, and in Baton Rouge since 1982. Although retired from medical practice and bench work, I am President of, and represent *The Hippocratic Resource*, a Louisiana-wide organization of physicians, dentists, nurses and other health professionals who have committed to promoting the life-respecting principles of the Hippocratic Oath, the foundation of medical ethics. My active career, included 26 years with the U.S. Public Health Service, produced some 55 research articles, several chapters for medical texts, and co-authorship of one such text. In 1989 my research was honored by a nomination for the Nobel prize in physiology and medicine. I have taught at both Tulane and LSU Schools of Medicine and Public Health, and also their Graduate Schools. Currently, despite retirement, I continue to serve on the research ethics board of Baton Rouge General Medical Center, and next month am having a new article published in *The Linacre Quarterly*, a journal devoted to the philosophy and ethics of medical practice; this one is on the U.S. traffic in human ova or oocytes, the basic cell used in human cloning. I mention all this, not for personal aggrandizement, but to serve as a basis for my comments on Representative Walker Hines’ HB 861, to establish an Umbilical Cord Blood Banking Program within the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH).

I am testifying in favor of this bill for the following reasons:

Umbilical cord blood and placentas are very rich in stem cells that can be relatively easily extracted, and can serve as an excellent source of these cells for both therapy and research. Such blood, tissue and cells can be banked for eventual use, either in case of need by the individual baby providing them – based on these being ideal sources of *compatible*, fetal stem cells - or can be pooled for others for therapies or for research. Because of their ready availability, umbilical cord and placental blood can be seen as potential sources of the multipotent, *non-embryonic* stem cells that are sought by researchers for theoretical use in the treatment of many degenerative diseases. However, in contrast to the moral and ethical dilemmas created by using *embryonic* stem cells for hypothetical therapeutic potential or for research – whether those are derived from human clones or from IVF procedures – umbilical cord blood or placental stem cell therapeutics and research are considered completely ethical (at least, if performed in an ethical manner!).

The use of placentas and umbilical cords as a source of *non-embryonic* stem cells has seen particular progress, based on their availability and biologic plasticity. In fact, even proprietary treatments with such pooled stem cells for, among other diseases, sickle cell anemia and childhood leukemia, are currently being tested in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. Nevertheless, despite their potential as a source of therapeutic and research materials, especially in the area of immune system or hematologic malignancy, placentas and umbilical cords are usually treated as medical waste – largely out of a lack of awareness of that potential on the part of the birth attendant and/or the baby’s mother. By providing a stable, credible and centralized information source within the Department of Health and Hospitals, as well as a base for disseminating information about the true value of such “medical waste,” plus information regarding the techniques and technology for maximizing correct retrieval of umbilical cord and/or placental blood and materials, many future lives can be saved or helped. This is what had to be done originally to create *whole blood-banking* as a routine, life-saving concept.

Basically, here in Louisiana, we are poised to be on the forefront of moral and ethical medical advances, ones not hampered by either ethical controversy or the distractions of pursuing the wrong means to good ends. We should not squander this opportunity to accelerate our forward motion in this medical area. I urge you to vote in favor of Representative Hines’ HB 861, and thank you very much for your attention!

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