

TESTIMONY REGARDING SB 97 (Senator Julie Quinn)

“Requires certain medical professionals to provide information about umbilical cord blood donation to pregnant women”

Senate Health & Welfare Committee, May 13, 2009 (Withdrawn by author)

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 with M.D., Ph.D. and M.P.H. degrees. I have lived in Louisiana since 1974, and in Baton Rouge since 1982. I am President of, and represent *The Hippocratic Resource*, a Louisiana-wide organization of physicians, dentists, nurses, scientists 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, 55 research articles, one medical text (as co-author), and several chapters for others. 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, as well as their Graduate Schools. Currently, I also continue to serve on Baton Rouge General Medical Center’s Institutional Review Board, helping to evaluate the ethics of research protocols undertaken, and recently published an article related to human cloning in *The Linacre Quarterly*, a journal devoted to the philosophy and ethics of medical practice. I mention all this in support of my comments on Senator Julie Quinn’s SB 97, which would require certain medical professionals to provide information about umbilical cord blood donation to pregnant women. This bill would expand the provisions of Act 163 from last year’s Legislature.

I am testifying in favor of SB 97 for the following reasons:

Umbilical cord blood and placentas are very rich in relatively easily extractable stem cells, 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 their 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 also be seen as important sources of the multipotent, non-embryonic stem cells that are sought by researchers for 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 embryos created by 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, have been tested in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas, although not all the results are yet in. 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 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, as was done by Act 163, many future lives can be saved or helped. This is basically what had to be done originally to create whole blood-banking as a routine, life-saving concept.

Thanks to having established the organizational structure by Act 163, Louisiana is poised to be on the forefront of medical advances based on stem cells, but ones not hampered by either ethical controversy or the distractions of pursuing the wrong means to good ends. Senator Quinn’s bill would build on this groundwork, utilizing the existing distribution of physicians, nurse practitioners and nurse midwives to expand the dissemination of this information to retrieve cord blood and/or placentas that would otherwise be discarded. The onus of compliance would remain with the Department of Health & Hospitals, as is appropriate for any public health measure, solely through provision of suitable informational materials. It would not be telling health professionals how to practice their art – a concern that I understand to have been expressed. Senators, we should not squander an opportunity to accelerate our forward motion in this expanding medical area. I urge you to vote in favor of Senator Quinn’s SB 97, and thank you very much for your attention!

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