

Of stem cells - 9 Mar 2009

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Today, Barak Obama should reverse George Bush's decision to prevent research into embryonic stem cells that originated after 9 August, 2001. This is good news for all those suffering from spinal cord injury, stroke, Parkinson's disease and many other conditions, including diabetes of both types. It may also have possible spin offs for people who have suffered heart attacks and other damage to cardiac muscle.

Embryonic stem cells have the potential to develop into any tissue in the body - hence the interest in using them in research. However, for those who believe that life begins at conception, there is a problem because their use means that embryos are killed in the process of harvesting the stem cells.

One positive result of the Bush ban is that scientists have put energy into looking at adult stem cells and started to find ways of manipulating them so that stem cells from skin, for example, can also develop into other types of cell.

However, it is embryonic stem cells that have shown the most promise and with the increase in funding for science that is likely to come with the Obama administration, there should be a general increase in the rate of new discoveries in medicine and many other fields.

The research may be too late for people who already have the conditions that will benefit from stem cell research. But the potential is there for major breakthroughs that will revolutionise the treatment of currently incurable conditions.

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