

## Legislature to duke it out over stem cell regulations

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Opponents of embryonic stem cell research in Michigan have mobilized to push for guidelines on how the research is carried out, setting up a battle that will play out in the state Legislature.

Among six bills introduced in June, one seeks to place unprecedented regulations on the state's 13 in-vitro fertilization clinics.

The procedure generates the embryos needed to help couples with fertility issues have children. If couples no longer need their embryos, they are frozen and may be donated for embryonic stem cell research, which many scientists believe could lead to cures for cancer, diabetes and other chronic ailments.

The proposal requires in-vitro fertilization patients to sign a consent form that addresses issues such as potential excess embryos, costs to store leftover embryos and a statement on the prohibition of accepting anything valuable in exchange for frozen embryos.

The bill also requires an annual report to the Michigan Department of Community Health that includes data already collected by the federal government as well as new information. For instance, it requires that clinics report the number of successful embryo implantations, miscarriages and infants with disabilities detected at birth.

Proponents of the bills say more detailed information is needed on national information, which is collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We don't have a clue how many embryos there are," said Ed Rivet, legislative director of Right to Life of Michigan. "If we are going to have a system in place where couples can donate, we ought to have some level of accountability."

They also add that women should know up front that more embryos than necessary will likely be created and they should be informed of the options available if any are left over.

In addition to science, frozen embryos can be discarded or donated to other infertile couples.

IVF clinicians counter that much of the data being sought duplicates information that is being collected on a national level, and the proposed requirements seek simple answers to complex questions.

In some cases, they say they may not know the answers because they are not present at birth and patients don't always know if they have had a miscarriage.

"If you are interested in knowing how many embryos are being thawed and donated for research, ask one question (to which) you will likely be given a correct answer and not go around with all this other stuff," said Ronald Strickler, director of education and research in the Women's Health Services department at Henry Ford Hospital.

The American Society of Reproductive Medicine has collected statistics from the nation's fertility clinics since the mid 1980s, spokesman Sean Tipton said.

A 1992 federal law requires all IVF clinics to report procedures to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, so the society collects the information and passes it on. "It will be real unfortunate if fertility patients in Michigan were made to suffer because some legislators didn't like that the people of Michigan voted for stem cell research," Tipton said.

Sen. Tom George, R-Kalamzaoo, disagrees.

"The public has an interest in knowing certain things," George said. "Having data will guide future policies. There is some interest in having some oversight, but it needs to be reasonable."