

Joint Subcommittee Studying Medical, Ethical, and Scientific Issues Relating to Stem Cell Research

HJR 584

The Joint Subcommittee Studying Medical, Ethical, and Scientific Issues Relating to Stem Cell Research held its first meeting of the interim on August 27, 2007. The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Delegate Robert G. Marshall.

House Joint Resolution 584 (2007) continued the Joint Subcommittee for one year, in order to (i) monitor the progress of the Virginia Cord Blood Bank Initiative, including various ways the bank could be utilized, such as treating first responders to a terrorist attack, and (ii) continue to review new and emerging issues in stem cell research and treatment. The first meeting was devoted to hearing an update on the Cord Blood Bank Initiative delivered by Dr. David Suttle of the Virginia Department of Health.

Dr. Suttle explained that the Initiative was currently in the process of incorporation as a nonprofit organization. The Attorney General will soon select an attorney to assist with the incorporation process.

He went on to detail the Initiative's progress thus far in researching options for getting a cord blood bank up and running. He mentioned that the representatives from Duke University have been extremely helpful during this process. Currently, Inova Hospital in Fairfax collects cord blood for the New York Cord Blood Bank, which is part of the National Marrow Donor Program. New York contacted Inova about collecting at their hospital, knowing the ethnic diversity there would be very helpful in diversifying their collection. New York sends in specialists to train Inova staff in the collection and initial processing necessary to preserve the cord blood during transport; then it is taken by courier to New York. Because no courier is available on the weekends, cord blood is only collected on Sunday through Thursday. Inova representatives are very interested in working with the Virginia Department of Health to begin collecting for our own cord blood bank; at the very least, they could collect on Fridays and Saturdays for Virginia's bank. Dr. Suttle noted that Friday is the most popular day for scheduled cesarean deliveries.

He also noted that currently, Virginia does have the capacity to make cord blood collection worthwhile. He stated that the consortium was looking at two separate approaches to getting started. First, they will try to work with existing cord blood banks, such as Duke's, since they already have a working process and storage facility. This is the fastest way to start collecting cord blood; in the meantime, consortium members will be writing grants to get the necessary funding for Virginia to get its own processing and storage facility.

In trying to gather additional funds for the Initiative, the consortium realized that a change in the enabling legislation would be necessary in order to secure any federal funds. Accordingly, Dr. Suttle asked the subcommittee to consider amending the Code

section establishing the Cord Blood Bank Initiative. He explained that in order to receive federal funding, we would have to strike the phrase "for Virginians" from the Code language, and agree to make the cord blood available to any match, worldwide, on a first-come first-served basis. The subcommittee unanimously agreed to support such legislation.

The chairman then suggested that the subcommittee write a letter to the Virginia Congressional Delegation to ask for their help in simplifying the burdensome informed consent process. Dr. Suttle had previously explained that the FDA mandated informed consent form was a major factor in low donation rates. It was agreed that the chairman would draft such a letter and circulated it among subcommittee members.

The chairman informed the subcommittee that he has invited Delegates Moran and Shuler, both of whom carried bills relating to stem cell research last session, to testify before the subcommittee at their second and final meeting this interim. The subcommittee then adjourned.