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Senate investigation recommends lifting Australian ban on stem cell cloning

The Associated Press

Published: October 30, 2006

CANBERRA, Australia A Senate committee on Monday backed a measure to lift Australia's ban on creating human embryos for stem cell research.

The Senate will next month debate legislation that would relax rules on stem cells research. Sen. Kay Patterson, who drafted the bill, said she was uncertain whether a majority of lawmakers would support the changes.

Patterson's cause received a boost Monday when the bipartisan Senate committee voted to recommend overturning the ban on so-called therapeutic cloning.

Scientists hope stem cell research eventually will lead to treatments or cures for conditions ranging from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases to spinal cord injury, diabetes and arthritis.

Parliament passed Australia's first laws on stem cell research in 2002, allowing scientists to extract stem cells from spare embryos intended for in vitro fertilization.

But those laws prevents embryos from being created for their stem cells in a process known as therapeutic cloning.

Patterson's bill maintains a ban on reproductive cloning, in which a cloned embryo is implanted in a woman's womb.

Opponents, including Health Minister Tony Abbott, warn that therapeutic cloning is open to abuse and could create animal-human hybrids.

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