

Man behind stem cell war may be peacemaker

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The U.S. researcher who set off controversy by taking stem cells from human embryos may have quieted critics by creating a stem cell without using an embryo.

James Thomson sparked a heated national debate in 1998 when his research destroyed human embryos. On Tuesday, his lab at the University of Wisconsin was one of two worldwide reporting a way of turning human skin cells in what seems to be embryonic stem cells without using an embryo, The New York Times reported Friday.

Thomson said he had ethical concerns about embryonic research, even though he said he knew it would offer insight into human development and held the potential for new treatments.

"If human embryonic stem cell research does not make you at least a little bit uncomfortable, you have not thought about it enough," he told the Times.

He said he never anticipated the political and ethical divisiveness his research created.

The new technique, which involves adding four genes to ordinary adult skin cells, will shorten the time before all the ruckus raised by stem cell research is memory.

"A decade from now, this will be just a funny historical footnote,"

Thomson said in the interview.

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