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## Human cloning an 'imminent threat': scientist

by Kathleen Gilbert

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WASHINGTON, D.C., December 13, 2010 (LifeSiteNews.com) - The obsession with pluripotent stem cells dominating America's medical research is not only hindering the progress of far more cost-effective stem cell therapies, but flinging the country headlong toward human reproductive cloning, warns one biotechnology expert.

Dr. Theresa Deisher, a molecular and cellular physiologist and an internationally recognized expert in regenerative medicine, explored the negative consequences of pluripotent stem cell technology in a speech in Washington, DC recently as she discussed a slippery slope towards objectifying human beings in modern biotechnology.

"Ultimately where we're really going is reproductive cloning," Deisher told the audience at the "50 Years of the Pill" conference hosted by Human Life International of America. "Reproductive cloning is not something in the future, it's not science fiction, we are able to do this very efficiently in animals, and this is an imminent threat to us in society."

Deisher, who has helped patent several medical breakthroughs, but does not profit by them, prefaced her remarks by warning that other stem cell experts who speak on the topic often hold patents on stem cell technologies and are in an position to benefit from their success.

"The lure of working with embryonic-like stem cells leads us to put our ethical compass in the garbage can," she said.

While usually touted as potentially useful for battling disease and injury, the technology for creating pluripotent cells - or cells that could grow into any form of tissue - "ultimately has led to discoveries that enable exact genetic reproductive clones to be created," according to Deisher. This includes induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells and other technologies.

The scientist said that those who envision cloning as part of a distant future where children are manufactured in a factory-like setting don't realize how close the reality is, because cloning is now set to take place inside women's bodies, not a lab. "That is not going to happen ... that's not the imminent danger," she said. "We're going to miss the real danger, which is reproductive cloning in utero."

In addition, said Deisher, the funding required for pursuing such technology is unjustly diverting resources from much more practicable and affordable technology with non-pluripotent stem cells that have already yielded dozens of cures and therapies but is not yet widely available.

While therapy with iPS cells would run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, she said, normal adult stem cell therapy can be made available for as little as \$5,000. But while animals in the U.S. can benefit from these treatments, they've not yet been approved for humans in the U.S.

While some pro-life organizations have raised the red flag over iPS cells leading to cloning, others have praised the technology for averting the murder of tiny human lives in the form of embryonic stem cell (ESC) research, a take that Deisher criticized.

"Pluripotent cells, regardless of how we get them, are neither useful for research or for human therapy," she said. "What this has done is it has robbed the American taxpayer of safe, affordable, and effective stem cell therapies that are being used throughout Europe and other first-world countries."