Issue Background

The AAN has long supported exploration into adult and embryonic stem-cell treatments, starting with its endorsement in 2001 of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines calling for federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research (ESCR). AAN members and their fellow physicians and scientists immediately recognized the potential of both types of stem-cell therapies to treat and perhaps cure conditions such as Parkinson's disease and spinal cord injuries.

Later that year, the White House issued a definitive policy that placed limits on the types of ESCR that could be funded by NIH research dollars. Specifically, all embryonic stem-cell lines created after August 9, 2001 became ineligible for federal funding. Federally supported researchers have since relied on 21 outdated lines of embryonic stem cells to conduct their work, out of over 400 currently existing lines.

In 2004, the AAN endorsed a position statement on ESCR calling for full federal support of all ethically sanctioned forms of stem-cell research, including therapeutic cloning (somatic cell nuclear transfer, known also as SCNT). The position statement also called for increased oversight of all stem-cell research, and a ban on reproductive cloning.

Since 2005, the AAN has supported state and federal legislation to expand the range of embryonic stem-cell lines eligible for government funding, and to promote high standards of scientific and ethical scrutiny. Bills were introduced in Congress this year (identical to the Castle-DeGette legislation vetoed by President Bush last year) to accomplish these goals.

In continuance of its support, this year the AAN joined the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research (CAMR), a leading advocacy group on the issue of stem-cell research. As part of CAMR, the AAN will collaboratively work to improve access to research and therapy options for American scientists, physicians, and--most important--patients.