

POLICY & PRACTICE

Stem Cell Committee Formed

Two arms of the National Academies, specifically the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, are convening a new committee to update the National Academies' voluntary guidelines on the conduct of human embryonic stem cell research. The committee's stated purpose will be to update last year's guidelines by the academies to reflect recent "advances in stem cell science." The voluntary guidelines "are intended to enhance the integrity of human embryonic stem cell research by encouraging responsible practices," according to a National Academies statement. The new committee will be funded by private sources that include the Ellison Medical Foundation, that supports research on ag-

ing and global infectious diseases; the Greenwall Foundation, that supports bioethics research; and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

Brain Health Strategies

Education, cardiovascular health, genetics, physical activity, and psychosocial factors all appear to be associated with brain health during aging, according to a report published online in *Alzheimer's and Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*. The report is a product of the National Institutes of Health's Critical Evaluation Study Committee, led by Dr. Hugh Hendrie of Indiana University in Indianapolis. The committee based its conclusions on several large ongoing studies of older adults. "This report sug-

gests a future direction of research and is a terrific example of what we can learn when scientists of diverse specialties work together on a complex health issue," said Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, NIH director. The committee reviewed 36 large, ongoing studies and found that higher levels of education correlate with good cognitive and emotional function, while depression and anxiety seem to be correlated with poor cognitive and emotional health later in life. The committee suggested consideration of a large clinical trial to look at exercise as an intervention against cognitive decline.

Poll Says Health Changes Needed

Americans agree that fundamental change is needed in the health care system, according to a poll sponsored by the Americans for Health Care and the Cen-

ter for American Progress, a liberal think tank. The poll of 1,100 adults, conducted in November 2005, found that 89% agreed with the statement, "With costs rising out of control and the quality of health coverage declining, the health care system in our country is broken, and we need to make fundamental changes." Support for the idea dropped to 49% when respondents were told changing the system might involve big government or higher taxes. While that is a significant drop, "the fact that nearly half of Americans remain solid in their support despite these concerns is a testament to not just the profound public dissatisfaction with our current health care system, but the strong popular support for extending coverage to all Americans," the center noted.

—Joyce Frieden

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