Audacious Hope or Unrealistic Expectations? Promise, Prudence, and Stem Cell Research

Linda Hogle
Departments of Medical History and Bioethics & Sociology, UW-Madison

Friday, February 27
4:00 PM
341 Bardeen

Patients and researchers alike are anxious to get new treatments into clinical use. But what some call bold, adventurous quests for ‘cures’ based on hope, others call a rash chase based on hype. Researchers, the media and therapy sponsors sometimes exaggerate the possibilities of discoveries, fueling patients’ and investors’ expectations of quick answers to unmet health needs. As stem cell research moves into a translational phase, alarm has been expressed about the rapid proliferation of putative treatments for a variety of serious ailments as well as trials that may not be transparent about their procedures, safety data or enrollment criteria. Patients respond that because of the constraints placed on the research in the U.S., they must look elsewhere for alleviation of their suffering. This presentation will discuss the tensions between pressures to move stem cell therapies rapidly to the clinic, patients’ desires to decide their own fate, and the need to understand basic safety and efficacy issues and to protect the public from potentially risky, unproven treatments. Examples from similar therapy debates will be used to illustrate how such tensions have been framed in the past, and how this might inform current concerns.

For additional information or questions, contact Jenny Dahlberg: npp@mhub.neuroscience.wisc.edu or 262-4932