

The lowdown on the stem-cell debate

Vice presidential nominee John Edwards said, "If we do the work that we can do in this country, the work that we will do when John Kerry is president, people like Christopher Reeve are going to walk, get up out that wheelchair and walk again."

One person outraged by that comment was Dr. Charles Krauthammer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, who is confined to a wheelchair because of a spinal cord injury he sustained as a medical student at age 22.

"In my 26 years in Washington, I have never seen a more loathsome display of clever cynicism. Hope is good. False hope is bad. Deliberately for personal gain, raising false hope in the catastrophically afflicted is despicable ..."

"The inability of the human spinal cord to regenerate is one of the great mysteries of biology. The answer is not remotely around the corner. It could take a generation to unravel. To imply as Edwards did, that it is imminent if only you elect the right politicians is scandalous."

Last weekend Christopher Reeve, who starred in four Superman movies, but was paralyzed in a riding accident, died of



— Mike Mulvanus

heart failure at age 62. He was a gallant sportsman for embryonic stem cell research. He will be missed.

Since embryonic stem cells were isolated and cultured in 1998, the promise of miracle cures for devastating diseases have collided with reality. After two decades of research, embryonic stem cells have not helped a single human being," asserts an ad appearing in "USA Today" by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "And they come with a hefty price tag. They are only obtained by destroying a living human embryo."

"Meanwhile, adult stem cells have helped thousands of people including patients with Parkinson's disease, spinal cord

injury, sickle cell anemia, heart damage ... And these stem cells are readily available, found in bone marrow, umbilical cord blood, skin, fat ...

For example, Dr. Richard Burck of Northwestern's School of Medicine, successfully has treated 100 patients for a variety of "auto immune" diseases in which one's immune system attacks itself such as multiple sclerosis and lupus.

"First, adult stem cells are taken from the patient's blood. Then, chemotherapy is used to kill all defective immune cells. The stem cells then are injected back into the blood stream, which become healthy immune cells. Of 25 patients with multiple sclerosis, all got better and two thirds have had no relapses," Dr. Burck reports.

He has used this same strategy to cure patients of scleroderma (a skin disease), Crohn's Disease, which destroys the intestinal system, Vasculitis, Wegener's Disease (inflammation of blood vessels), Behcet's, Sjogren's (involving glands and lungs) and a half dozen others.

In an Aug. 17 radio address, John Kerry referred four times to the "ban" on embryonic stem-cell

research allegedly imposed by President Bush. That is a blatant lie.

George W. Bush is the first president to approve federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, and \$2 million of grants have been made. Also, the National Institutes of Health has made 22 "lines of stem cells" available. Dr. Leon Kass, head of the President's Council on Bioethics, says there are 3,500 embryos of stem cells available for researchers.

Third, there is no ban on privately funded research. Christopher Reeve's foundation has made \$4 million available and he is conducting his own studies. California voters will decide whether to approve a \$3 billion bond for yet more research.

Yet there are two moral questions involved. Why shouldn't more public research money be invested in adult stem cell research that already has been proven effective than in embryonic stem cells where the possibilities are only theoretical?

A deeper moral issue is whether it is ethical to kill human embryos to advance research.