

MOVING TOWARDS A DETENTE IN THE STEM CELL DEBATE

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The Nature Editorial titled “Smoke and Mirrors”¹ on the Second International Vatican Adult Stem Cell meeting was ironically itself a collection of smoke and mirrors beginning with the lack of a named author. The editorial focused on an Italian parliamentary decision to allow stem cell treatment for a child with a devastating and lethal disease that had been stopped by regulators against the parents and physicians wishes². In actuality, the Vatican is a State separate and independent from Italy, and balanced, compassionate, and realistic regulatory oversight was not questioned at the Vatican meeting.

The editorial opted for prejudicial phrases such as: “sick children were paraded”. Instead the meeting was inclusive of concerns from patients. The author states that the Vatican is “naïve”. A less sensational description of the Vatican's position is altruism. The editorial states that the meeting was “shamelessly choreographed” “with stem cell companies and scientists desperate to hawk a message”. This denigrates all speakers at the Vatican conference including a Nobel Laureate as well as other academic researchers not affiliated with companies marketing adult stem cells. In contrast, the World Stem Cell Summit was praised for including scientists, doctors, patients, and stem cell companies³. Perhaps it could be said that the Nature editorial was itself shamelessly choreographed to hawk a message.

Demagoguery is the antithesis of Science. No person or institution should have their freedom of

speech or ethical concerns ridiculed or made to fear collaboration especially from a scientific journal. On the other hand, there are historical concerns and lessons why religion, business, science, and State require transparency, independence, and separation. Unfortunately, the Nature editorial missed the opportunity to discuss these transcendent concepts.

The etymology of the word education has been partially obscured by the passage of time, but in Portuguese, perhaps the most Latin of the Romance languages, the word “educado” means polite. “Educational” editorials that avoid emotional trigger words and promote détente of the stem cell debate are in the best interest of patients, science, and humanity.

Conflicts of Interest: All three authors work with both adult and embryonic stem cells and were speakers at the Second Vatican Adult Stem Cell Conference.

References

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