

Pro-Life News in Brief

BY Liz Townsend

Adult Stem Cell Treatment Saves Singer Don Ho

Hawaiian singer Don Ho announced that his serious heart condition was treated successfully by stem cells derived from his own blood. The 75-year-old performer, best known for his song "Tiny Bubbles," told the *Associated Press (AP)* that he is ready to return to the stage.

"I'm feeling terrific, 100 percent better," Ho told the *AP*. "I'm ready to go, but I've got to listen to the doctors. When they say my heart is strong enough to get excited, I'm on."

Ho's condition is called nonischemic cardiomyopathy, or a weakened heart muscle. His heart muscle's "ejection fractions," which is the measurement of the ability for the heart to pump blood, were 10–15%, compared to a healthy rate of 55–65%, the *AP* reported. He had a pacemaker implanted a year ago, but his condition continued to deteriorate.

From reports on the Internet, Ho found out about the VesCell adult stem cell therapy developed by Dr. Amit Patel and conducted in Thailand. Blood was drawn from Ho, the stem cells were extracted and multiplied, and they were reinserted into his heart during a procedure in a Thailand hospital December 6.

Patel told the *AP* that the procedure went well. "His prognosis in terms of recovering from surgery, thus far, is good," Patel said. "In terms of singing, it would really be up to him."

Ho plans to resume his show in Waikiki soon. "A lot of people out there come every year to get their 'Tiny Bubbles' fix," he told the *AP*. "So as long as they keep coming, I might as well keep doing it. I retired about 40 years ago. I'm just having fun."

Italian Bioethics Committee Supports Tube Feeding

An Italian government bioethics committee voted in late September to support tube feeding for unconscious patients, just as a 38-year-old Italian man thought to be in a coma began to speak and challenged doctors' pessimistic diagnosis.

"The doctors said that I wasn't conscious, but I understood everything and I cried in desperation," Salvatore Crisafulli of Sicily told Italian media in October, according to *Reuters*. Crisafulli had been in a coma since a scooter accident in October 2003.

Crisafulli's brother Pietro was instrumental in his recovery, according to the *Guardian*. He cared for his brother by himself for more than a year, eventually fighting for Salvatore to be admitted to a hospital in Tuscany for better treatment last May. A few months after his admission to the hospital, Salvatore began to recover consciousness and speak.

"My brother speaks and remembers," Pietro Crisafulli told *Corriere della Sera* newspaper. "I don't expect that he will be like he was, but it's already a miracle.

"And to think that some doctors said that it was all useless and that he would be dead in three, four

months.”

Salvatore Crisafulli's story highlighted the deliberations of the government's bioethics committee, which voted to require that unconscious patients be given nutrition and hydration. "To feed an unconscious patient through a tube is not a medical act," said the committee's president, Francesco D'Agostino, according to Reuters.

"It's like giving a bottle to a newborn baby who can't be nursed by its mother ... and then we reflect on the Schiavo case. The woman was left to die of starvation."

The bioethics committee is preparing a position paper on the treatment of unconscious patients. The committee acts as an advisor to lawmakers.

New Jersey Funds Embryonic Stem Cell Research

As NRL News went to press, time had apparently run out on two New Jersey proposals to promote and fund projects that included destructive research on human embryos. In the first grants awarded under New Jersey's Stem Cell Research Grant Program, the Commission on Science and Technology on December 16 had earmarked \$5 million for 17 projects studying stem cells. Three of the 17 involve cells derived by killing a human embryo, the first state-supported funding of such destructive research.

In addition, the Senate passed a bill December 15 to send a proposal to voters next November authorizing \$350 million in bonds over the next seven years for stem cell research, the *Associated Press* (AP) reported. But the proposals ran into trouble in the House.

By January 3 a spokesman for the state Assembly said the lower house had no plans to consider the measures in the few remaining days of this session, according to the AP. Bills that have not passed both houses by the end of the session—January 9--must be reintroduced.

The organizational meeting for the next Legislature is January 10. According to the AP, the Legislature "must pass the bond referendum bill by Aug. 1 to get it on the November ballot. As a practical matter, however, the measure must be approved by June 30, when lawmakers recess for the summer."

Under the legislation which expired in the Assembly, each of the projects would receive about \$300,000 over the next two years. Most of the projects involve mouse embryonic cells and human adult stem cells, such as those from bone marrow and placentas. None of these would harm human beings, and they were approved unanimously by the commission.

The three controversial grants would use existing embryonic stem cell lines to study their characteristics and to train researchers in using embryonic cells, according to the AP

Not all of the commissioners had supported research on human embryos. Commissioner Richard Goldberg, vice president of public affairs for Parsippany-based DRS Technologies, voted against those three grants. "The destruction of embryos is not something that I can in good conscience support," said Goldberg, according to the *Daily Record*.