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April 14, 2004
Dr. Bruce Alberts
Office of the President
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20418

Dear Dr. Alberts:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities, representing 60 prominent research universities in the United States, I am writing to express support for the National Academies' proposal to develop voluntary guidelines to encourage responsible practices in human embryonic stem cell research. As an increasing number of universities engage in stem cell research, it is critical that the scientific community develop ethical guidelines that address basic science and health policy issues related to stem cells.

While stem cell lines have been available for federally funded research since August 9, 2001, the community has not developed any widely accepted research standards. The National Academies now have an opportunity to propose standard practices that will carry great weight in the scientific community and prevent confusion, if individual states and/or organizations attempt to develop their own guidelines. AAU encourages the National Academies to (1) convene a committee of individuals from the fields of cellular biology, public health policy, reproductive medicine, bioethics, and clinical research and (2) hold a public workshop to gather information and facilitate a public discussion on guidelines for human embryonic stem cell research.

In our view, guidelines developed with the input of thoughtful leaders in biomedicine and bioethics would be welcomed by the academic community and our fellow citizens. Guidelines for responsible research on human embryonic stem cells would reassure the public and Congress that the scientific community is attentive to ethical concerns and capable of self-regulation as it proceeds with stem cell research.

Cordially,

Nils Hasselmo, President