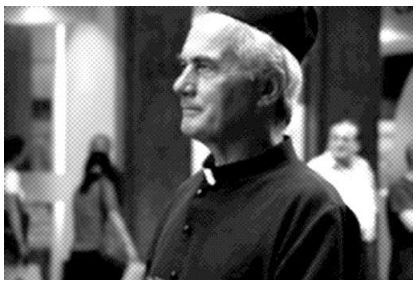
Janice Fortune
Doctor

Janice is a doctor who treats people with back problems. Many of her patients have damaged their spines in accidents and cannot walk. Janice can treat pain, but she cannot make her patients walk again. Recently, some of her patients have travelled abroad and paid thousands of dollars for experimental stem cell treatment. Janice knows that scientists still have a lot to learn about stem cells. She is worried that patients are paying for treatments that don't work, or might even do them damage. She thinks we should stop arguing about whether to use embryos in research and concentrate on making sure patients are given proper advice. After all, isn't a patient's life worth more than a ball of cells?

Thomas Field
Young adult

Thomas is 18 years old. He lives in a very poor neighborhood. People he knows are dying from drug overdoses and violence. He doesn't understand why so much time and money is being spent on stem cell research to cure things like diabetes and heart disease and doesn't see how this research will benefit his life in any way. He thinks that this money can be spent in better ways to save human life.

Father O'Reilly
Catholic priest



Father O'Reilly is a Catholic priest. He believes that human life is sacred right from the beginning. When a sperm fertilizes an egg, a life is created and we must protect it from that moment on. Father O'Reilly thinks research on embryos should not be allowed at all. Experiments should only be done on stem cells from a baby's umbilical cord blood, or on adult stem cells. He has also heard that scientists have discovered how to turn normal skin cells into cells that behave just like embryonic stem cells in the lab. He hopes this new discovery will help stop experiments that use embryos. The Father knows there is a lot of suffering in the world and thinks we should help people as much as we can. But he believes that an embryo is a human life and nothing can ever make it right to end a life.

Grant Cameron
Scientist

Grant is a scientist. He is in charge of one of the top research teams working on embryonic stem cells. Grant often hears people saying that research on embryos is wrong because embryos have to be "killed". He thinks this kind of argument is emotional and unreasonable. The embryos used in research are at a very early stage of development. Each embryo is only 4 or 5 days old. It is just a ball of cells. Grant thinks it would be wrong to stop research on embryos when it could help us cure many terrible diseases. He knows that adult stem cells could also be very useful, but he believes that embryonic stem cells are important because they can form ANY kind of cell in the body. How can it be right to protect a ball of cells instead of trying to help millions of people with diseases like cancer, heart disease or diabetes?

Liz Hernandez
IVF patient

Liz Hopeful has been married for 5 years. She has a baby daughter called Lara. She couldn't get pregnant at first, so she and her husband had IVF treatment to have Lara. They still have 6 embryos left in cold storage. All of them have names. At the IVF clinic, Liz and her husband were asked if they would like to donate some of their embryos to stem cell research. Liz is horrified by the idea that her embryos could be experimented on. She thinks of them almost like babies that haven't had a chance to grow up. She can't understand how anyone could give their embryos to scientists for any kind of experiment. Liz's husband disagrees with her. He says that if they do not donate the embryos to research, they will be wasted. They will be frozen and stored for 5 to 10 years and then thrown away.

Amanda Prentice
Scientist

Amanda is a young stem cell scientist. She is studying adult stem cells. She got interested in stem cells when she heard how they can be used to save lives. For example, skin stem cells are used to grow new skin for people who have been very badly burned. Doctors take stem cells from a tiny unburned part of the patient's body and use them to grow new skin in the laboratory. The patients would die without this skin, but it is not perfect: it has no hair or sweat glands. Amanda wants to solve this problem. She thinks adult stem cells will be very useful for treating other injuries and diseases too. She knows another scientist who is already using adult stem cells to repair people's eyes after accidents. And that's just one example. Amanda thinks everyone talks about embryonic stem cells too much. Adult stem cells are just as important.