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# The Korean Stem Cell Scandal — It Was All Faked

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Reports coming our of Korea indicate that the entire research project headed by Dr. Woo-Suk Hwang was based on fakery and fraud. *The Globe and Mail* [Toronto] reports:

*An already disgraced scientist lied about all of the stem-cell lines he claimed were matched to different patients through cloning, investigating researchers say, in a new blow to the shattered reputation of Hwang Woo-suk. Yesterday's announcement all but ends the fraud investigation into one of three major cloning breakthroughs claimed by the one-time scientific superstar and national hero. Probes of Dr. Hwang's two other groundbreaking experiments are still under way at Seoul National University, where he worked before resigning in disgrace last week.*

*Science Daily* reports that investigators have found “no evidence” to back the scientist's claims. *The New York Times* was blunt in its assessment: *The announcement by the panel, from Seoul National University where Dr. Hwang did his research, suggested that he did not just grossly exaggerate his work in an article published in the journal Science in June, but fabricated the entire paper. “So far we could not find any stem cells regarding Dr. Hwang's 2005 paper that genetically match the DNA of patients,” Roe Jung Hye, the university's dean of research affairs, said in a statement. “According to our judgment, Dr. Hwang's team doesn't have scientific data to prove that it has produced such stem cells.*

Scientists around the world were quick to accept Dr. Hwang's claims just a few weeks ago, and his supposed success in cloning human cells was trumpeted as a breakthrough toward the use of human embryonic stem cells, developed from specific individuals, in medical research and treatment. Once again, promising developments in the use of adult stem cells — which can be derived without ethical complications or the destruction of an embryo — were sidelined as proponents of human embryonic stem cell research championed Dr. Hwang's research. Now, his reputation is destroyed.

Nevertheless, the editors of *The Boston Globe* were quick to insist that this posed no threat to the use of therapeutic cloning. “The Korean stem cell scandal is more a comment on human frailty than it is about the merits of therapeutic cloning,” the paper insisted. “Stem cell research has the potential to make major contributions to fighting diseases, but the breakthroughs required may be more difficult than was apparent just a month ago.” No kidding. The use of the word *may* in that sentence is worth noting, especially when the paper acknowledged: *Now it turns out that none of the cells in the 11 batches were produced as a result of cloning. And the Koreans are reexamining the first report to determine whether Hwang's lab at Seoul National University had done any human cloning at all.*

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