



Original article found online at: <http://freebeacon.com/issues/taxpayers-paid-for-intact-human-fetal-brains-from-stemexpress/>

Taxpayers Paid for Intact Human Fetal Brains From StemExpress

Documents shed light on tissue procurement process for medical research

[Share](#)

[Tweet](#)

[Email](#)



Close-up of an ultrasound / AP

BY: [Elizabeth Harrington](#)

November 5, 2015 12:00 pm

Taxpayers have paid for intact human fetal brains intended for use in medical research, at a cost of as much as \$1,080 per brain, according to documents obtained through a public records request.

Researchers at the University of Connecticut studying brain development for the National Institutes of Health have used federal funding for over a decade to obtain up to two fetal brains per month.

Internal emails between Dr. Nada Zecevic, a neuroscientist at UConn, and officials at Planned Parenthood and StemExpress shed light on the tissue procurement process for medical research, the subject of an ethical debate since the release of a series of undercover videos targeting the nation's largest abortion provider.

Between 2012 and the present the project spent \$10,161.73 on fetal brain tissue, according to [records](#) maintained by the university and additional [invoices](#) obtained by the *Washington Free Beacon*.

Funds were used for two fetal brains and over a dozen tissue samples totaling \$7,130 from StemExpress, the California-based tissue company that had to [cut ties](#) with Planned Parenthood following the Center for Medical Progress videos.

Zecevic also spent federal funding on two second trimester brains from Advanced Bioscience Resources Inc. costing over \$300, and an intact calvarium for \$645.

Zecevic first corresponded with StemExpress CEO and founder Cate Dyer, who [was caught on video](#) saying "another 50 livers a week" would make her company happy, in July 2010.

"We could defiantly [sic] provide you with fetal brain specimens," Dyer said, attaching a fee for service schedule for "Fetal Cadaverous Procurement."

The fee list revealed that StemExpress charges \$180 for a second trimester specimen, and \$390 for first trimester. A "complete POC," or product of conception, cost \$890. StemExpress defines POC as "any fetal organ or other fetal or placental material taken from the human uterus during an abortion."

StemExpress charges \$45 more for "tissue cleaning" and special requests, and \$80 for storing on dry ice, plus delivery fees.

"We have 65 cases today to choose from ranging from 5wks to 18weeks," Dyer told Zecevic, four days after the initial email. Later that night she told Zecevic and "18wk Brain Specimen is coming via FedEx."

"We were able to oxygenate the media but are all very anxious to hear your feedback!!" Dyer said.

Other emails later that year reveal that StemExpress uses a "Fetal Foot Chart" to determine the age of the fetus. In another email Dyer sent Zecevic a photo of brain tissue collected after 16 weeks.

In November 2011, Zecevic seemed unhappy with StemExpress's services.

"Hi Cate, we got the tissue today, although quite late and in pieces," she wrote. "Anyhow we will try to use it."

In one of the Center for Medical Progress videos Dyer [said](#) her company sometimes sends the entire heads of aborted fetuses to researchers because of the difficulty sending neural tissue.

"Yeah, tell the lab it's coming," Dyer joked. "So they don't open the box and go, 'Oh god!'"

'A well-characterized collection of human fetal brains'

Zecevic's research has received nearly [\\$3.8 million](#) from taxpayers since 2001. The purpose of the [study](#) is to learn how the brain develops by comparing brain tissue between humans and mice, in the hopes of preventing psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and autism.

For years Zecevic obtained fetal brains from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine tissue repository in New York, which she [described](#) as having a "well-characterized collection of human fetal brains." The repository also obtained its tissue from aborted fetuses.

"I have been collaborating with The Albert Einstein Brain Bank and have been receiving brain tissue from them since 1995," Zecevic wrote on a [grant application](#) to continue the project in 2010. "This tissue is obtained from autopsies done after medical abortions (with the consent of parents) and shipped on ice in buffer, fixative solution or tissue culture solution."

At the time, the lab had a "fetal brain collection" of 85 cases "ranging in age from 5 to 24 gestational weeks."

The grant application, which was approved, explains how the researchers took care to reduce the amount of pain for the mice that were used as test subjects.

"Procedures for ensuring that discomfort, distress, pain, and injury will be limited: There is no pain or discomfort associated with anesthesia and immediate subsequent decapitation," the document states.

Planned Parenthood: The specimens we 'donate'

When Albert Einstein College of Medicine could no longer consistently provide material, Zecevic later turned to other tissue providers, and attempted to obtain fetal brains from officials at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England.

An official at Planned Parenthood put scare quotes around the word "donate" when discussing the potential partnership.

"I am starting to gather information to see if we can accommodate your request," [wrote](#) Sally Hellerman, director of medical services at the affiliate in an email dated June 21, 2011. The subject line read "products of conception from Planned Parenthood."

"When we did this with Yale, they only took a small quantity of villi so we were able to send the remainder to the lab for a pathology reading," she said. "Could you find out if someone at UConn could produce a pathology report on the specimens we 'donate'?"

"How many specimens do you want and how often?" Hellerman asked.

Planned Parenthood has been accused of selling aborted body parts for profit. The organization has denied any wrongdoing.

Zecevic then explained that she typically received a "whole hemisphere" from Albert Einstein University and informs Planned Parenthood that she cannot accept tissue from fetuses that have been injected with chemical solution.

"Having good tissue once per month would be excellent (we can even skip some months, so 8-10 times per year)," she said. "I do not know the exact method how it is done in your clinic and a lot depends on this (injecting solutions is not good). May be we can meet and discuss that in more details."

Hellerman followed up the next day with details of what Planned Parenthood Federation of America requires for tissue donation.

"Patients will need to sign an informed consent," she wrote. "The doc performing the abortion will need to chart that aborted tissue was donated, consent was obtained, and there was no substantive alteration in the timing of terminating the pregnancy or of the method used."

"None of these are insurmountable," Hellerman said.

Zecevic ultimately could not get tissue from the Planned Parenthood affiliate because of the method of abortion used at that clinic.

"I spoke with Dr. Spurell yesterday, and he crashed all my hopes," Zecevic said. "Apparently the procedure that is done does not leave intact tissue, and there is nothing we can use. Thanks anyhow for your time and attempts to make this work."

The House of Representatives has launched a select committee to investigate Planned Parenthood, which was already forced to [stop accepting payment](#) for tissue donations, in light of the videos.

Both the National Institutes of Health and UConn defended the research and use of taxpayer funding for fetal brains obtained from abortions. StemExpress and Planned Parenthood did not return requests for comment.

"For more than two decades, Neuroscientist Dr. Nada Zecevic has studied the development of the human central nervous system—including the brain," said Lauren Woods, a spokesperson for UConn Health. "At times for her NIH-sponsored research work, she has purchased and repurposed in limited quantities tissue samples of aborted fetuses to conduct her advanced research gaining critically needed insights about how the human brain first develops, its cellular inner-workings, and the foundation of human brain function."

"Given the complexity of the human brain, there is no animal tissue that could serve as a research tissue substitute," she said. "Her unique research work and findings are advancing the field of neuroscience and contributing to the development of preventive and future therapies for debilitating human neurological and psychological brain disorders, such as mental disabilities, multiple sclerosis, and schizophrenia."

The NIH said human fetal tissue has played an essential role in developing vaccines. Projects involving human fetal tissue totaled \$76 million last year.

"Human fetal tissue is also a critical resource for researchers studying retinal degeneration, pregnancy loss, human development disorders such Down syndrome, and early brain development, with relevance to autism and schizophrenia," said NIH spokesperson Renate Myles.

"Processing costs for human fetal tissue are allowable for an NIH-supported research project provided that they are consistent with all policy/regulatory/legal requirements of the funded project and are compliant with the cost principles," she said.

"Processing costs for human fetal tissue are allowable for an NIH-supported research project provided that they are consistent with all policy/regulatory/legal requirements of the funded project and are compliant with the cost principles," she said.

This entry was posted in [Issues](#) and tagged [Abortion](#), [Planned Parenthood](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).