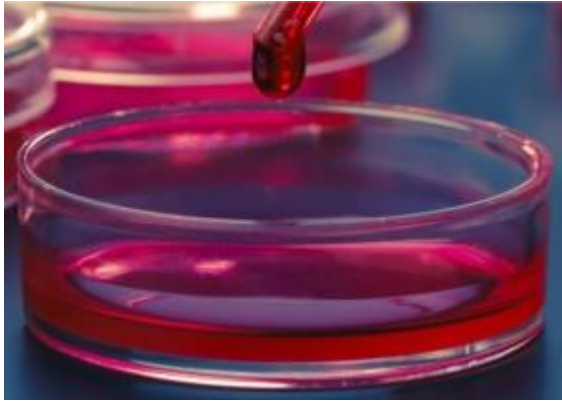


## NHMRC publishes new resource to assist people contemplating stem cell treatments

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Stem cells are considered by many to hold the ultimate promise for repair and cure for a variety of chronic and degenerative conditions. While great progress is being made in understanding how stem cells work and how they may be used to treat a variety of illnesses, there is still a considerable way to go before they become part of standard treatment. Despite this, many people travel overseas or visit private Australian clinics to undergo untested and unproven stem cell treatments.

In a [statement released in December](#), the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) warned that unproven stem cell treatments available in Australia and overseas could pose risks to the health and well-being of patients.

The NHMRC have released two documents, '[Stem Cell Treatments – a Quick Guide for Medical Practitioners](#)' and the patient-targeted document '[Stem Cell Treatments – Frequently Asked Questions](#)'. These documents inform medical practitioners and their patients about the stem cell treatments that are available, and the risks associated with unproven treatments.

Stem cell treatments for MS are currently limited to autologous haematopoietic stem cell transplants (stem cell transplants from the patient's own bone marrow).

This treatment is regarded as a highly aggressive and experimental form of therapy and is generally only considered in specific cases at a limited number of hospitals. Other forms of stem cells are being intensively researched in the laboratory for their properties to calm inflammation and encourage repair and regeneration in the central nervous system in MS, however, they are yet to reach the clinical trial stage. Despite this, some private Australian and overseas clinics offer autologous stem cell treatments to people with MS with no evidence for their safety or efficacy.

The NHMRC encourages patients considering stem cell treatments to seek additional information from a trustworthy source other than the clinic or practitioner offering the treatment. Patients should also speak to their general or specialist medical practitioners about their decision.

The [patient resource document](#) also provides a list of questions to ask treatment providers when considering a specific treatment.

'Our resources provide information to support practitioners and patients in their discussions about stem cell treatments, and ultimately to assist people to make informed choices about their medical care,' said NHMRC Chief Executive Officer, Professor Warwick Anderson.

The documents can be downloaded from the [NHMRC website](#).