

Irish Council for Bioethics

Stem Cell Research

20.11.06

Introduction from Humanist perspective

As a secular organisation the HAI view will be that taken from a humanely ethical, non-dogmatic, scientific stance.

The HAI doesn't view the cells at the earliest stages as being a human being any more than a single sperm or egg is. If understanding how cells develop and cultivating them can alleviate suffering and promote health we would support technology to develop their use. We would support a time limit on use of cells and controls.

We would not want market forces being allowed to dominate the progress and ethical considerations in this area; nor allow for patenting of therapies which are meant for the benefit of humanity as a whole.

Consent from the originators of the stem cells is crucial-women donating cells must know that they have done so and must do so willingly. Stem cells from fetuses lost through miscarriage must carry this same condition.

If there are alternative methods of cultivating stem cells with equal therapeutic benefit it would avoid distress to those who have religious or ethical objections and we would welcome those. Our prime concern is be to promote benefit to those people suffering from degenerative illness who can be saved pain and disability We do not regard pain and disability as desirable.

As regards chimeric embryo production it can be a powerful tool to reveal the sequence of organ/limb development. Humanists support the continued growth of understanding of the human body. We would not support the existence of hybrid human/animals but our understanding is that this is not the intention of such scientific study.

There are issues about humanity, and we regard public awareness and education as highly important. In order to protect and promote ethical use of stem cell therapy the HAI supports specific legislation in the area; legislation based on science not dogma. If people do not wish to benefit from medical advances derived from such research in the future, that is their prerogative.

As biological science is developing very quickly it is reasonable to have controls via legislation; taking step by step advances is a sensibly cautious approach but it should not preclude or deny the advances which are of such benefit to humankind.

We regard human cloning as a separate but related issue.

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