

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING, AUSTRALIA  
RESPONSE TO NHMRC SCIENTIFIC, ETHICAL AND REGULATORY  
CONSIDERATIONS RELEVANT TO CLONING OF HUMAN BEINGS.**

Royal College of Nursing, Australia endorses the recommendations in the report of the Australian Health Ethics Committee. The College also endorses the position of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) that “human cloning violates the right to one’s unique genetic identity and dignity”.<sup>1</sup> The College believes that there is an urgent need for strengthened regulation and community debate.

The College acknowledges the many benefits to the health and welfare of people from the Human Genome Project where it is able to eliminate the dreadful impact of serious genetic disorder. In fact not to do so where the technology exists, the College considers would be unethical. While there are many advantages equally there are disadvantages and challenges to human freedoms from the Human Genome Project.<sup>2</sup> Opportunities arise for challenges to the privacy, confidentiality and discrimination of people by the misuse of genetic information. The College does not believe that these challenges mean there should be a prohibition on human genomic science but rather regulation and where necessary legislation based on respect for human dignity.

The College supports national and international regulation in relation to genetic science. It is not enough for some countries to have established review and regulatory bodies as genomic science affects all human beings in every country and will increasingly do so as the science progresses. The UNESCO document, *Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights*, has been an important stage in the development of a more universal recognition and regulation of genomic science. The Human Genome Organisation and the WHO involvement have also been fundamentally important in a move to international review and regulation. However, the College believes this move should be strengthened by the establishment of a national body in each country that feeds into an international regulatory organisation. It is important for countries like Australia to have a separate body that is responsible for review, monitoring and regulation in relation to all scientific, ethical and social progress/impacts associated with human genetics, and accountable to the people through the elected government. The College regards the establishment of such a body a matter of urgency.

The College also considers the level of debate in Australia insufficient to develop policy, guidelines or regulation about an issue that has the potential to create a revolution in society. The difficulties that arise are embedded in the complexities and the scientific nature of the topic. Society must be kept informed other than by the disclosures offered selectively by the media. Scientists must be able to disseminate information and progress in a way that the average person can understand and be able to enter the debate, because it is the average person who will be impacted on by this ‘revolution’. Until there is much more informed, open debate by all sections of the community, the College does not believe that effective control will ensue.

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### **References**

1. International Council of Nurses 1998 *Cloning and Human Health*. International Council of Nurses, Geneva.
2. Kirby, M. 1999 *Human Freedom and the Human Genome*. The Law Foundation, [http://www.fl.asn.au/resources/kirby/papers/19990125\\_val.html](http://www.fl.asn.au/resources/kirby/papers/19990125_val.html)