

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1
Output Group: ARC

DEST Question No. E706_04

Senator Harradine asked on 18 February 2004, EWRE Hansard pp. 34.

Question:

Senator HARRADINE – The report states:

“The initial membership of the stem cell ethics committee will be established from nominations by the centre, participating organisations and associated institutes, and coordinated by Professor Bob Williamson of Murdoch.”

Can you provide the committee with the institutions from whom nominations were sought?

Mr HARPER – I will need to take that on notice. My understanding is that the committee is still in the process of establishment.

Senator HARRADINE – Can you provide me with details as to how this is proceeding structurally?

Mr HARPER – Yes, but I will need to take it on notice.

Answer:

Institutions from which nominations were sought for the stem cell ethics committee

The ARC has provided the following response:

The potential therapeutic outcomes from research in stem cells and tissue repair have profound implications for individuals, families and society. While there is the potential to dramatically improve human health, such research raises a number of complex ethical and social issues. The Independent Ethics Advisory Committee (IEAC) was established, with support from the NSCC, to address such issues in a forum independent from the specific perspectives of the NSCC.

The IEAC is an autonomous entity and the NSCC has no direct role in determining membership, composition, governance, projects or communications of the IEAC. The NSCC's agreement with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, as the convener of the IEAC, was to provide seed funding of \$65,000 to assist in the formation of the IEAC, with the understanding that the existence of this committee would enable educated discourse and ethical advice regarding issues in stem cells and tissue repair, including discussion of differing views held by people from differing sectors of society.

To date, specific institutions have not been contacted to directly nominate people to the IEAC, although the process is underway of identifying individuals from a variety of professional backgrounds (including science, medicine, law, ethics, religion, philosophy, government, indigenous communities, patient advocacy networks, charities, finance, business and historical disciplines) who have contributed to public debates, discussions and

materials regarding ethics and biomedical science. The IEAC is willing to accept suggestions for potential committee members from all appropriate sources.

The two events held to date with sponsorship from the IEAC have included representation from individuals outside the stem cell researcher/medical practitioner community. The inclusion of individuals such as Rev. Dr. Norman Ford SDB of the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics, a member of the Steering Committee of the Catholic Health Australia Code of Ethical Standards, Mr Graeme Joy, a parent of a child with cystic fibrosis and Ms Cassy Harris, a financial contributor to the Lions Trust community charity group, in the IEAC activities to date arguably reflects the commitment to engage people from the general and religious communities in the IEAC membership.