



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.
Affiliated with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS) and
the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) London, UK.
GPO Box 1555, Melbourne VIC 3001

The Senate Community Affairs Committee
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600

c/o Ms. H. Strnad
2 Houston Court
Box Hill South VIC 3128



Tel: (03) 9808 8024
email <rosslyn@netspace.net.au>
Webpage: vicnet.net.au/~humanist.html

Re.: THE LOCKHART REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

SUBMISSION FROM THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC. (HSV)

The HSV is a secular organisation whose members foster an ethical, reasoned and responsible approach to life. It supports human rights, democratic processes, and a just and inclusive governance.

It seeks to alleviate suffering, to promote well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational, counselling and charitable activities.

The views that follow have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all HSV members are invited. Further supportive information is obtained from print publications, the Internet, public lectures and from individuals with relevant expertise.

The Convenor of the HSV Submissions Committee is authorised to present these views.

GENERAL REMARKS

1. We write in support of all recommendations of the Lockhart Committee's Review on stem cells research. We are impressed by the quality of their deliberations.
2. Humanists believe that ethical problems arising from modern biotechnology should be debated and resolved on the basis of secular morality where the needs, interests and benefits of sentient beings are paramount.
3. We believe there is a moral and societal obligation to promote research with the potential to alleviate suffering. The present legislation seriously impedes such aim.
4. The decision to debate this issue in Parliament and in public is belated but very welcome indeed.

We add some comments:

SPECIFIC POINTS

5. We strongly support the present ban on reproductive cloning of human beings.
6. It is imperative to have a regulatory system to licence and monitor this research as recommended by the Lockhart review. In the UK, the Statutory Licencing Authority established in 1990 regulates, via a licencing system, all creation, research and treatment of human embryos in vitro. There is a Code of Practice that underpins such research. This could be implemented here nationally.
7. Our strong support of therapeutic cloning is based on its ability to provide multipotent stem cells genetically compatible with the recipient. Such perfect immunological match avoids the serious problem of tissue or organ rejection.
8. The significant and widespread support for this research encourages us in our attitude.
 - * The Australian Academy of Science in its Position Statement (4.2.1999) advocated therapeutic cloning "for the benefit of mankind."
 - * The Australian Medical Association supported this research thus: "This technology holds enormous potential for decreasing human suffering, especially in the area of disease." (AMA President, Dr Sandra Hacker, 9.8.1999)
 - * The legislative freedom to research this very promising therapy exists in the following countries: UK, USA, Canada, NZ, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Israel, Singapore and China.
9. It is of concern that our restrictive laws in this area cause a steady loss of experts in stem cell research. Drs Martin Pera, Dianna DeVore and Paul Simmons are some examples of our leading stem cell scientists now working overseas.

10. On the moral status of an embryo, we comment as follows:
 - a. Given that in vitro some 50% of embryos do not implant and are discarded in the menstrual flow, we support the view that life begins at implantation in the womb and the formation of the 'primitive streak' - a rudiment of the nervous system 14 days after the fusion of ovum and sperm.
A viable, implanted embryo has, in our view, a moral status.
 - b. There is a marked difference between an embryo created by the fusion of an ovum and a sperm, and one that arises from somatic cell nuclear transfer. The latter is a single adult cell without the prospect of implantation. The cluster of cells produced from such single adult cell should have the status of that cell which is not a moral agent.
 - c. It is difficult to reconcile the notion held by some of our legislators that a nuclear transfer 'embryo' has a moral status and the right to the sanctity of life rule, and the fact that our laws require the destruction of unused embryos in fertility programs.
11. The gross misinformation on therapeutic cloning spread by its opponents, is of concern. We note that many of those who oppose this research are the groups and individuals who opposed the IVF procedures some 25 years ago.
We believe this is so because there is no prescribed doctrine on these techniques.
12. An intensive and widespread campaign of education in the public arena via media outlets, lectures and publications is essential to dispel the many misconceptions about therapeutic cloning for stem cell research.
13. In our view, the informed and carefully thought out recommendations of the Lockhart Committee should be implemented in national legislation ensuring uniform research practices throughout the States.

Yours sincerely,



Halina Strnad,
convenor, submissions committee.
28.9.2006.