

write in my private capacity to urge all Federal politicians from WA to oppose the legislation currently before Parliament to permit “therapeutic” human cloning in line with the recommendations of the Lockhart Committee.

In 2002 Federal Parliament voted overwhelmingly to ban all forms of human cloning, recognising it to be morally indefensible. Nothing has occurred in the intervening four years - in particular no scientific breakthrough - that would justify a departure from that position.

Therapeutic cloning involves the creation of a human embryo for the express purpose of experimentation on that embryo to produce embryonic stem cells, supposedly for use in the treatment of conditions such as Alzheimer’s Disease and Parkinson’s Disease. You don’t need to be a practising Christian - or indeed to subscribe to any religious faith - to appreciate that this a fundamental abuse of mankind’s creative powers.

Within my own family, I have lost my father to Parkinson’s Disease and a cousin to Alzheimer’s Disease. Neither of them was a regular churchgoer, yet I can say with complete confidence that they would have been appalled at the suggestion that another human being be created and destroyed to enable them to continue living.

There is, I understand, little evidence to date that embryonic stem cells will provide a medical breakthrough in the treatment of these conditions, and attempts by the advocates of human cloning to claim otherwise simply raise false hopes amongst sufferers and their families. The respected South Australian research scientist Professor Peter Rathjen has expressed the view that Alzheimer’s could **never** be a candidate for stem cell therapy – even using adult stem cells.

On the other hand, adult stem cells are already being used successfully in the treatment of a number of other human diseases and conditions, including Parkinson’s. Adult stem cells harvested from umbilical cord blood, bone marrow and the nose pose none of the ethical problems of embryonic cells and also present a safer alternative in that they exhibit no tendency to form tumours after implantation.

I would therefore urge all Federal Parliamentarians to reject this attempt to divert medical research in Australia down paths which are both medically questionable and morally indefensible and, instead, to support measures designed to encourage Australian scientists to take a leading role in the development of safe, effective and ethical adult stem cell technology.

Regards,

Neil Fearis