

Submission to the Inquiry, by the Senate Community Affairs Committee, into Legislative Responses to Recommendations of the Lockhart Review

The content of this submission has been prepared by Dr Barry Howard Wilkins who assumes responsibility for its content. Dr Wilkins is a children's intensive care physician at a major Australian children's hospital. He has a significant background in medical basic science theory and research including a masters' degree in physiology and biophysics and a medical doctorate in developmental physiology. He and other signatories subscribe to the following assertions having reviewed scientific and ethical evidence.

1. The Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002 and the Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002 were passed unanimously by parliament on the grounds that the creation of human embryos, either by *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) or by cloning, deliberately for stem cell harvesting and then for destruction, is unethical. In our opinion this has not changed. Any new legislation which undoes any part of the above Acts and permits embryos to be created deliberately for death, not life, remains unethical and therefore unacceptable. We submit that the use of surplus IVF embryos (which were created with a view to allowing infertile couples to have children, and therefore created for life) is completely different from the situation where no life is ever intended.
2. We believe that to produce human life just for it to be destroyed, even for the possible benefit of another, is actually inhuman. It is also sociologically unacceptable because the embryo so created has no place in the human family. It is an orphan created for destruction.
3. We see no distinction between producing an embryo by uniting sperm and egg on the one hand, and cloning on the other. The end result is identical in each case - an embryo capable of developing into a mature human. We cannot dehumanize an embryo because it was produced by cloning.
4. We remind the Committee that the word "Embryo" means to "develop within" (Greek, to swell within). This underscores our understanding of all embryos as potential infants, then adult humans, the purpose of creating them being to develop a human infant within a mother's womb.
5. We remind the Committee that the word "Clone" means an "offshoot" (Greek, a twig). A clone is a near identical copy of another human being, just as a cutting from a plant produces an identical copy. A clone cannot, semantically, scientifically or ethically be described as less than fully human.
6. We submit that the use of the term "Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer" (SCNT) as a way of avoiding the term "Clone" altogether is a mischievous play on words designed to deceive the public that it is not really a clone at all. SCNT is simply the mechanism by which a clone is produced. It remains a clone. It remains human. It remains prohibited by the Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002. No future legislation should misrepresent this to the public.

7. We are strongly in support of all ethical scientific research. We understand that research using adult stem cells (obtained from adult human tissues without harming the donor) and cord blood stem cells (obtained from blood taken from the umbilical cord of infants after that cord has already been properly and correctly severed from the infant who suffers no loss) is already in progress with some promising results. Indeed, cord blood stem cells are already used in treating fatal diseases in children, including some patients treated by the first signatory of this submission. We see no evidence that it is scientifically necessary to enter the ethically controversial area of embryonic stem cell research. We believe that the public around the world has been deceived by unsupportable promises that embryonic stem cell research can deliver more than adult stem cell research.

8. Finally, we believe that any entry into this controversial area represents an attitude of mind that humankind must be master of its own destiny. "Playing God" is perhaps an overworked phrase, but that is exactly what we shall be doing if we change legislation to allow creation of human embryos for the purpose of deliberate destruction in the name of science and deceiving the public that it promises a cure or alleviation of disease that is not obtainable by other means. The correct avenue, scientifically, ethically and sociologically acceptable, is research using adult and cord stem cells which is already in progress.

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