

IS AN EMBRYO HUMAN?

Until interference with foetal life began with legalised abortion, society agreed that human life is a continuum from fertilization to death. To say that life begins at any time after the sperm joins the egg is arbitrary. Everything needed for it to grow into an adult is present from the start. What is really being argued is whether the human embryo deserves protection.

The respect with which we accredit a pregnant woman is symbolic of the regard due to the life they carry. There is no genetic difference between the foetus she carries and the 'surplus' embryos in test-tubes in IVF labs.



THE BIBLE SAYS...

This research involves the killing of human embryos. Scripture shows us that the unborn are known and valued by God (Ps 139:13-16). Genesis 9:6 prohibits the killing of fellow human beings who are made in the image of God.

It is unethical to sacrifice one group of humans, to benefit another. Scripture warns against this utilitarian approach to ethics, that is, doing evil so that good may result (Rom 3:8).

Isaiah 1:17 calls us to defend the

cause of the fatherless. Unwanted embryos, in a very real sense are the 'fatherless' in our community.

Cloning is also wrong. God makes each baby unique. This helps us accept children as they are rather than loving them on the basis of 'desirable' characteristics.

Human life is a precious gift from God. It is by no means a commodity to be bought and sold.

Scientists who want to experiment in this area will continue to create a demand for the creation of human embryos. How will IVF clinics be encouraged to create less embryos when this is the case?

WE MUST ACT NOW

Is a fully-fledged campaign against embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning really worth the effort? We know theoretically, as Archbishop Jensen has argued, that life is a continuum from fertilization to death. But embryos are so 'faceless' – it's hard to be enthusiastic about a 'clump of cells'.

But we look back in frustration at those Christians who acquiesced, with a regretful shrug, to travesties of the gospel in the past. For instance, the slave trade at the time of William Wilberforce, the infanticide of female children in Northern India, the euthanasia of the disabled by the Nazis and even the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

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We must speak out against the destruction of foetal life (including abortion). Talk about the 'slippery slope' is not empty rhetoric. If embryonic stem cell research leads to therapeutic cloning, therapeutic cloning will only lead to people wanting to push the boundaries even further to the creation of human clones.

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Don't throw the baby out...

A large, high-contrast black and white photograph of a human face, focusing on the eyes and nose. A white grid pattern is overlaid on the face, creating a technical or scientific aesthetic. The text "Don't throw the baby out..." is written in a large, white, serif font across the top of the image.

**A SOCIAL ISSUES
EXECUTIVE
discussion paper:
embryonic stem cell
research and
therapeutic cloning**

Since the pro-abortion campaign of the 1970's, society's view on the status of the human embryo has reached an all time low. Now thousands of unwanted embryos from the IVF program are going to be destroyed in the name of 'science'. Where is embryonic stem cell research leading us? And why is it time for Christians to act now?

BACKGROUND

What is a stem cell?

Stem cells are those body cells, which have the capacity to develop into many different body tissue types. They are also special as they can replicate themselves indefinitely, unlike other cells in the body.

Where do stem cells come from?

■ Embryos

Embryonic stem cells are found in embryos, which are 5-7 days old. Removal of the stem cells kills the embryo.

■ Other sources

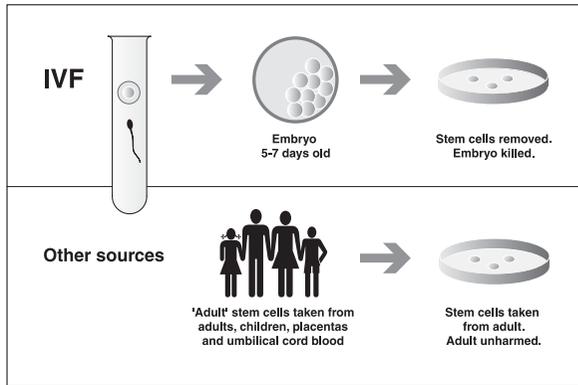
Cells from sources other than embryos (commonly called 'adult stem cells') are found in the brain and bone marrow of adults and children. They are also found in placentas and umbilical cord blood. Obtaining cells from these sources do not result in the destruction of life.

Why are scientists interested in stem cells?

Because stem cells can be transformed into other cell types, scientists hope they will learn to control this process and use them for medical treatments in diseases which are currently untreatable.

Have embryonic stem cells been effective in treating disease?

There have been few reports of success using em-



Adult stem cell research offers direct therapeutic benefits, unlike embryonic stem cell research - and without the ethical glitch.

Embryonic stem cells. Instead, problems such as tumor formation were reported.

Can adult stem cells be used to treat disease?

Yes. Adult stem cells have already resulted in actual benefit to patients suffering from heart disease, spinal cord problems and recently Parkinson's disease.

What is the connection between embryonic stem cell research and cloning?

If an embryonic stem cell was injected into a patient, the cells would be rejected by their immune system. To overcome this problem, scientists suggest making a clone of the patient so they can destroy it when it is a 6-day-old embryo to extract the stem cells. These stem cells could be injected

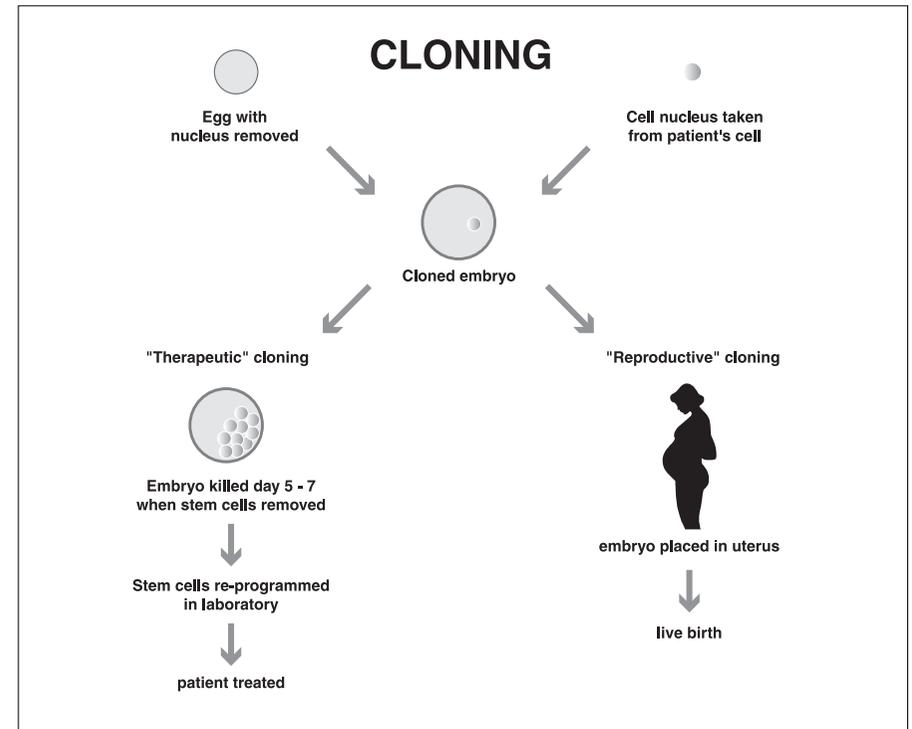
into the patient without risk of immune rejection, as they would be the same as the patient's cells.

This cloning method is the same as that used to create 'Dolly' the sheep. If the clone were allowed to keep developing in a womb, a baby would be born. Scientists have said that making a clone to extract stem cells ('therapeutic cloning') is different from making a clone to grow a baby ('reproductive cloning'), but it is exactly the same process.

Is cloning involved in adult stem cell treatment?

No. Because the cells could be taken from the patient's own body and reinserted, there is not a problem with immune rejection.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY



Cloning is the logical step from embryonic stem cell research. It will be debated within a year's time.

Following the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) meeting, the Prime Minister and State Premiers have agreed that the 70,000 surplus embryos, created by the IVF program, should be available for scientists to use for embryonic stem cell research.

In the lead up to this meeting the Prime Minister, John Howard, sought advice from Archbishop Peter Jensen.

The Archbishop's comments to the Prime Minister and related statements can be viewed on the Social Issues website.

In order for consistent Federal laws to be formed on the use of surplus embryos in the IVF program, a vote must be taken in the State and Territory Parliaments **before June 2002**. NSW Premier Bob Carr says he is not going to allow a conscience vote on the matter.

We may have missed

our opportunity to prevent the destruction of the 70,000 embryos at hand. But we must act now to prevent the destruction of future embryos and even the specific creation of embryos for research.

A Melbourne Scientist, debating the Archbishop on ABC radio, admitted that the legislation does not go far enough to permit the practice of cloning. Cloning will be the next debate and is likely to arise within a year.