



Workshop:

Ethical aspects of stem cell repositories and stem cell databases
Brussels, 17 February 2005

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The problem of broad informed consent is that we do not know what exactly we are going to do with the given stem cell lines in the future, so we cannot tell the people exactly. But what about the things that we do know now and that are risks or potential developments – do we have to tell them as well? In 10 years' time our main justification for using the samples is not that someone gave consent to them 10 years ago, but because there are no ethically controversial aspects against conducting our research and that the results of our research will bring something good for the society.

Will that be the “informed” consent in the future: “it is not dangerous to you and it is good for society...”?

The view is that if you set a collection of stem cells, you do that for a specific research project. Obtaining consent is only one aspect justifying the usage of biological material in the research. The reasons that support our doing research are completely drawn from other reasons.

The challenge of our society is to how to let those alternative groups of people to be heard. It is important to ensure a democratic choice where science is made more democratically accountable and representing different groups of people.

There is no agreement on what is human dignity. There is only an agreement of what is against human dignity.

Why there is one tradition for hair selling and another tradition for other parts of human body selling?

The first principle in ethics should be consistency. However, there is an opposing view that consistency is a concept from logic. We should not be widely inconsistent, but that is not the same as being consistent. Is it consistent to say that aborted embryos, created embryos, etc. are all the same?

If you get an agreement on some even non-major things, this is still a step forward and it is an achievement.

The most restrictive law in Europe for IVF is in Italy. According to the Italian law, if the embryo cannot be implanted for some serious reason, it should be left until its natural extinction. There will be a referendum regarding this IVF law.

The differences between different countries are also the differences in the ranking orders of various interests concerned. If you rank a woman's right higher than the efforts to conduct research – it may be completely consistent. Talking about consistency, we must look at the context and at the ranking orders as well.