

The Passion of Medicine is not Enough

Ethical medical research is under attack as also is the future of medical practice. Even if we want to stay out of the debate, we cannot unless we are also prepared to compromise in our own practice of clinical medicine. There are already significant voices around the world (e.g. Julian Savulescu) arguing that doctors who will not offer care that is legally permitted because it conflicts with their values, should not be doctors.

It is no longer enough for us to be passionate about today's practice of medicine. Considering the threats to medical ethics in the 21st Century we must also be passionate about the future of medicine and the moral direction our nation is taking.

About a year ago a medico acquaintance of mine without any religious affiliation surprised me by saying he considered the main crisis we were facing in the 21st century was the definition of what it meant to be human.

Featured on Starbucks's take-away coffee cups as part of its "The Way I See It" campaign this year was the following by Wesley J. Smith

The morality of the 21st century will depend on how we respond to this simple but profound question:

Does every human life have equal moral value simply and merely because it is human?

Answer yes, and we have a chance of achieving universal human rights.

Answer no, and it means that we are merely another animal in the forest.

On his website Wesley J. Smith says that his writings "reflect my understanding that the philosophy of human exceptionalism is the bedrock of universal human rights. Or, to put it another way: human life matters."

Of immediate concern is the back-bench revolt against Cabinet's decision not to proceed with the Lockhart Report recommendations. This has now ensured a conscience vote when legislation comes before Parliament – a vote I fear we will lose.

The report recommends we move from the use of 'spare' embryos for destructive research to the specific creation of embryos for this purpose including by cloning and by implanting human genetic material into animal eggs.

The 'safeguard' on all this is to ban implantation and ensure destruction of the embryos before 14 days. But it will only be a matter of time before someone in need of a formed organ rather than just stem cells will demand a later stage embryo. This has already been argued by Will Saletan in "*The Organ Factory: The Case for Harvesting Older Human Embryos*".

The basis for extending the time limit for embryo destruction will be on the grounds that the embryo is not an *aware* human person – consistent with the ethics of some who argue that destruction is even acceptable up to several weeks after delivery.

For fuller discussion of these matters, see www.medicinewithmorality.org.au.

What needs to be done?

If you are in agreement that we should not go in this direction but don't want to actively lobby, please check out the website above. Signing in will ensure your voice will be effective in a corporate way. As another doctor said to me recently 'this is too big for me to sit back and watch'.

Better still would be for you to personally visit federal MPs in your state. I have prepared a kit for this purpose that you would be free to modify as you wish.

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