



AHRC Research Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality

HFEA, Hybrids and Chimeras: A consultation on the ethical and social implications of creating human/animal embryos in research July 2007

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Personal Information

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Are you responding on behalf of an organisation: Yes/No

Q1.

The following types of embryo research are already legally permitted and licensed in the UK. Which of them, in your view are acceptable?

- / Research using human embryos donated by IVF patients
- / Research using human embryos created specifically for research from donated eggs and sperm
- / Research using cloned human embryos created specifically for research through nuclear cell replacement (CNR)
- No research using human embryos is acceptable
- Not sure/undecided

Q2.

Do you think that the HFEA should issue licences to allow research using cytoplasmic hybrid embryos?

- / Yes
- No
- Not sure

Please give reasons for your choice:

In our view this research carries the potential to promote advances in human health, and, provided that minimal harm is caused in the process of retrieving eggs from animals, we consider that this research is less ethically problematic than research on living, sentient animals who have the capacity to feel pain. Legally we consider that the granting of such licenses probably does fall within the jurisdiction of the HFEA. We would, however, also stress the importance of actively pursuing other research options - such as, using adult or cord blood stem cells, or investigating how eggs derived from foetal tissue could be matured for research purposes - as well as actively striving to increase donations of human gametes.

Q3.

Do you think that the law should in future permit the creation of true hybrid embryos for licensed research purposes?

Yes
No
/ Not sure

Please give reasons for your choice:

Given the considerable scepticism in the scientific literature regarding the likelihood of such hybrid embryos surviving beyond the two or four cell stage, coupled with doubts about the possible research applications of such embryos, we think it is not currently possible to speculate as to whether law should in future permit the creation of such embryos for research purposes.

Q4.

Do you think that the HFEA should in future issue licenses to allow research using human chimera embryos?

Yes
No
/ Not sure

Please give reasons for your choice:

Once again, owing to scientific doubts as to the putative benefits of this research, we do not see that an ethical case has been made out for the granting of such research licences. We note that the HFEA consultation document states that “none of the scientists that we consulted could see a purpose for carrying out such research” (para 2.19).

Q5.

If you have answered yes to questions 2 to 4, what limits do you think should be placed upon human embryo research?

We would suggest that the following limits should apply to research on human embryos:

- a) Oversight by a statutory licensing body
- b) No research after the point at which embryos acquire the capacity to feel pain. Given that the current 14 day time limit (which marks the appearance of the primitive streak) does not in our view have any special ethical significance, we would propose abolishing the statutory time limit and leaving the issue of time limits for research to the regulator’s discretion up to the point at which issues concerning sentience (which is morally relevant) arise.
- c) Where human gametes are used to create embryos we would stipulate that they are obtained with valid informed consent and with minimal harm to the donor.
- d) In the case of animal gametes we would require that no more than minimal harm should be caused to the source animal, whose welfare is an important ethical consideration.