

## STEM CELL RESEARCH

21 November 2007

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD :** I wish to place on record—as I did about this time last year in my Matter of Interest of 15 November, so it is almost a year to the day (one week out)—the Family First party's position concerning embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning. Nothing has changed from the position I indicated then, including our firm view that we reject the creation of human life and then harvesting from that life the cells required for the therapy of others. More simply, Family First absolutely rejects the creation of life for the purpose of destroying it.

What has changed has been some interesting developments in relation to the merits of such research. Let us not forget that the South Korean Hwang Woo-suk, who claimed to have made a great leap forward in his research, was exposed as a fraud. There has in truth been no great advance at all in embryonic stem cell research. Indeed (and I think honourable members would be aware of this), in breaking news last weekend the Scottish scientist Professor Ian Wilmut, who led the team that infamously cloned the sheep Dolly in 1996—some 11 years ago already—is now actually abandoning cloning and working instead on creating stem cells without an embryo, starting with skin cells. That is adult stem cell research, something that Family First would wholeheartedly endorse and has no ethical problem with whatsoever.

I note that I had this speech planned and was pleasantly surprised by the coincidental front page story in *The Australian* today about the very welcome news of the creation of induced pluripotent stem cells—or iPS cells for short—without using human eggs or embryos. This explains the recent publicity about Professor Wilmut moving into the type of research that Professor Yamanaka has proclaimed to the world overnight. Let me add again that we welcome Professor Yamanaka's marvellous breakthrough, as it has no ethical questions or dilemmas involved in it whatsoever.

I further note that in South Australia just one single scientist has applied to use the spare IVF embryos, and nation-wide the National Health and Medical Research Council has granted just 10 licences in total to research these so-called excess IVF embryos. Indeed, on 26 July the Brisbane *Courier Mail* reported that major Singaporean/Australian company ES Cell International was actually abandoning work on embryonic stem cells due to a lack of success and soaring costs, with the likelihood of having products in a clinic in the short term described as 'vanishingly small'.

Eleven years after the infamous Dolly incident and zero subsequent results in embryonic stem cell research, by comparison the far more ethical adult stem cell research has a number of achievements, including:

- it has treated over 70 conditions, including heart disease, bone and blood based cancers and leukaemia;
- in Australia we have the world first adult stem cell centre at Griffith University which was established in 2006. The centre is researching adult stem cell lines to develop cures for epilepsy, schizophrenia, Parkinson's, and motor neurone and mitochondrial diseases, for instance producing 20 million adult stem cells using olfactory stem cells taken from the adult nose;
- in the United States, due to ethical concerns, a far greater proportion of money is being spent on adult rather than embryonic stem cell research.

In summary, the point that I am making is that the advances in embryonic stem cell research have been virtually nothing whatsoever. The advances in adult stem cell research and the positive uses thereof have been significant and are well documented.

Many of the original scientists who were researching in the area of embryonic stem cells have turned their back on that research due to cost and, simply, the results they were getting were not satisfactory; that is, there were no breakthroughs. Furthermore, adult stem cells research has no ethical concerns whatsoever for anyone. As far as Family First is concerned, therefore, in terms of conducting further research into adult stem cells or

embryonic stem cells, the case is closed (if I can put it that way). Clearly, any further research money should be poured into adult stem cell research and not embryonic stem cell research.