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A step in the wrong direction [1]

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Yet again, the state is trying to assume control over our bodies. Last week it was Gordon Brown?s 'presumed consent' for organ donation, this week it is 'specific consent' over tissue being used for stem cell research.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's bill would require specific consent from those whose tissue would be used for stem cell research, regardless of the date of tissue donation. That may sound reasonable, but as a letter to The Times from twenty-nine top stem cell researchers (including three Nobel laureates) put it:

> *?many existing cell and tissue samples and cell lines were donated, for any research purpose, by patients (now untraceable) with particular diseases, before this sort of research was even imagined. These cells have been well characterised over many years, or have unique properties and may therefore be the best samples to use for the derivation of embryonic stem cells. Such stem cell lines would be of great value in understanding how diseases develop, as well in the search for therapies.*

Clearly people donating tissue or their entire bodies are interesting in progressing science and healthcare for the sake of others, but HFEA's proposed legislation will require a new bank of tissue will need to be created, costing hundreds of thousands of pounds, and more importantly ? time. The bill also blocks any donations from children, regardless of consent, which means that some scientists whose research has already been approved will not be able to proceed.

Baroness Royall has told the House of Lords that ministers will reconsider the bill, but that they could not accept the amendments put forth by Lord Patel of Dunkeld, the chairman of the UK Stem Cell Network Steering Committee:

> *We believe the use of their genetic material to create cloned embryos or human admixed [interspecies] embryos is exceptional and requires exceptional consent.*

One week consent is presumed, the next it is specifically needed. It seems as though the government can?t make up their minds about anything.

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