

## Summary of Responses from REACH Online Discussion Forum and e-Consultation

On 7 November 2007, members of the public were invited via a press conference and subsequent media reports and announcements to provide feedback on the BAC's Consultation Paper on Donation of Human Eggs for Research. To facilitate public deliberation on the issues presented in the Consultation Paper, the following scenario was posted on a discussion forum (called "discussion corner") managed by REACH<sup>1</sup>, to specifically seek views on:

- whether healthy women, not undergoing fertility treatment should be allowed to donate eggs for research and if so, under what conditions; and
- whether compensation of egg donors amounts to inducement.

### Scenario

Abi's father suffers from Parkinson's disease. Since his late 40s, her father started to experience muscle rigidity, tremors, memory loss and a slowing of movement. The family is concerned that he may lose physical mobility in a few years. From what she has been told, Parkinson's disease affects the nerve cells in a part of the brain that controls muscle movement. The exact cause is not known and there is also no cure for it.

Abi learnt that her niece, Carol, is part of a research team at Merlion Medical School (MMS) that is conducting embryonic stem cell research that could lead to a cure for the disease in the long run. However, the research is proceeding slowly due to a shortage of human eggs. Abi feels that she should donate her eggs to help advance the research even though the procedures involved are invasive and carries some health risk. While a cure may not be found quickly enough to help her father, future generations may benefit from the research.

Abi discussed her intention with her older cousin, Betty, who will be undergoing *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) at Merlion Hospital. IVF is a clinical and laboratory procedure whereby the eggs and sperm from a couple are extracted and fertilised outside their bodies. Such a procedure is a kind of assisted reproduction aimed at increasing the chances of a couple conceiving a baby. After speaking with Abi, Betty is also thinking of contributing some of her eggs not used in her fertility treatment to MMS.

---

<sup>1</sup> REACH (Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry <http://www.reach.gov.sg/>) is an agency set up by the Singapore Government to engage and connect with its citizens.

**Questions:**

- (i) Do you think Abi, who is 35 years of age and a mother of three children, should be able to donate eggs to MMS for research? If Abi needs to take time off from her work so that she could donate her eggs, do you think she should be compensated (either fully or in part) for the loss of her income, inconvenience and risk involved? If so, what type of compensation would be acceptable and not amount to an inducement?
- (ii) Carol, who is 21 years of age, was inspired by her aunt Abi and she wants to donate her eggs to help advance the work of her research team. Do you think she should be allowed to do so? If she is, do you think she should receive any payment for the time, inconvenience and risk involved? Carol is a graduate student at MMS and does not receive an income.
- (iii) IVF is an expensive procedure, and even then, the couple undergoing the treatment may not be successful in conceiving a child. Eggs that are leftover from the treatment may be kept for future use, donated to other infertile couples, donated for research or destroyed. If Betty decides to donate her “spare” eggs to MMS for research, do you think she should be subsidised by MMS for the cost of her IVF treatment?

**Summary of Responses**

1. From 7 November 2007 to 7 January 2008, a total of 47 entries were received on REACH’s Discussion Corner and 10 responses through the e-Consultation. These 57 responses were from at least 44 individuals.
2. Many respondents indicated that healthy women should be allowed to donate eggs for research because women should be able to decide on how to use their eggs so long as such decision is made voluntarily and on a fully informed basis.
3. The reasons given by those opposed to allowing healthy women to donate eggs for research are:
  - a. religious concerns;
  - b. associated health risks; and
  - c. possible exploitation of women.
4. A number of respondents expressed the view that advancement of science is a public good. Thus, some compensation is considered appropriate because donors have contributed to the public good.
5. Support for the provision of subsidy to women who contribute “spare eggs” from fertility treatment for research was also based on the idea of public good.

6. Respondents who opposed the provision of compensation or subsidy were generally against any form of commercialisation of the human body.
7. Even where respondents expressed support for the provision of compensation or subsidy to donors, they were generally of the view that donation of materials for research should remain altruistic.
8. Only a handful of respondents appeared to be supportive of outright commercialisation although some respondents considered this to be necessary for the advancement of science or for long term societal benefit..
9. Concerns that were emphasised include:
  - a. Duress and inducement, and the need to ensure the voluntary nature of informed consent;
  - b. Safeguard against the commercialisation of the human body (although some respondents considered this to be necessary for the advancement of science or for long term societal benefit);
  - c. Privacy of donors and the confidentiality of their information;
  - d. Proper information to be provided to donors and in a manner that is effective in facilitating understanding;
  - e. Availability of medical care for short-term and long-term adverse health consequences arising from the egg donation procedure; and
  - f. Exploitation of women, especially from poor countries.