

Activities Exploring the Regulation of Stem Cell Research

(An extract from *Stem cells: Science and Ethics*, 3rd Edition. To view the full resource visit www.bbsrc.ac.uk/stemcellsresource)

Activity 1 - The construction of regulations and laws

In small groups, consider the list of laws below and add 4 or 5 more examples of your own. Then group them into:

- Laws that the whole group agree with.
- Laws that the whole group disagree with.
- Laws that some of the group agree with and others disagree with.

Discuss the list your group has drawn up.

Why do you hold the view that you do?

What would you say to someone who disagrees with you?

Who should decide what laws there should be?

Pick one of the laws that have fallen into

category 3. Try and rewrite it so that everyone agrees with it.

- Compulsory wearing of seatbelts in cars.
- Compulsory wearing of crash helmets on motorcycles – should this be extended to bicycles?
- The ban on selling (rather than donating) an organ, like a kidney, to someone who needs a transplant.
- The permission to create embryos for research purposes.
- The ban on burning domestic waste.
- The ban on buying or being bought alcohol until over the age of 18.
- The ban on marrying more than one person.

Activity 2 – The role of the public in developing laws

As a group, discuss how valuable the role of public consultation is in your opinion.

List the pros and cons of this approach. Here are some points to consider:

- Should we hold a public consultation every time a new law is proposed?
- How should Government deal with a range of different views?
- Is there a risk that those who shout loudest will be heard over others?
- Should we necessarily introduce laws supported by the majority?

(Remember: it is often suggested that the majority of the public think we should bring back hanging. Is this a good enough reason to do so?)

Use the following web link to find and contribute to a public consultation which interests you.

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/PublicConsultations/index.htm>

Activity 3 – The patenting of embryonic stem cells

Read the news article in EuroStemCell.org about the European court ruling which bans the patenting of stem cells. It can be found at:

<http://www.eurostemcell.org/story/european-court-bans-stem-cell-patents>

By yourself or with a friend consider the pros and cons of the European court decision. In addition to the potential economic impact, you might consider:

- (a) whether or not it is legitimate to have one rule for the whole of Europe when different countries have different approaches to this, or
- (b) whether or not this is an appropriate ruling because of the important moral status of the embryo and because we need more consistency between countries.

If you are a school student you could design, write and conduct an anonymous poll of your classmates as to whether or not they feel it is right that patents of embryonic stem cell inventions should be banned in Europe. Discuss the results of the poll.