MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH
FINLAND
National Advisory Board on Health Care
Ethics (ETENE)
Ritva Halila

OPINION

Rec no.
fg

28 February 2006

Ministry of Trade and Industry
Paula M A Nybergh, Director-General
POB 32
00023 GOVERNMENT

Subject FD THE 7TH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH OF THE EU AND STEM CELL RESEARCH

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has requested the opinion of the National Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics (ETENE) regarding the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research and stem cell research. The request was appended with the text of Article 4 of the 7th Framework Programme, which concerns human embryonic stem cells. Since the Ministry of Trade and Industry asked to obtain the opinion of the Advisory Board as soon as by 6 March 2006, the General Secretary and the Chairperson of the Advisory Board have prepared the opinion, based on our previous opinion. The previous opinion (DNo.13/710/2003, 28.8.2003) to the Ministry of Trade and Industry can be found at ETENE's www site http://www.etene.org/dokumentit/KTMkantasolutEN.pdf. National ethics boards have published a document dealing with stem cells, cloning and research, in which ethical and legal issues related to the research into stem cells are discussed. The publication is available at: http://www.etene.org/dokumentit/KantasoluENG.pdf.

The European Commission did not fund embryonic stem cell research within its 6th Framework Programme because of the Member States' different views regarding both research on embryonic stem cells and so called therapeutic cloning. It is proposed in the draft 7th Framework Programme that embryonic stem cells could be researched except for research that is aimed at human reproductive cloning, changes in human genotype at the gamete level and the production of embryos exclusively for the purpose of research, which would also involve therapeutic cloning. In addition, Germany and Italy have proposed further restrictions on the research on embryonic stem cells.

The Finnish legislation forbids the production of embryos exclusively for the purpose of research, as well as research for the purpose of developing procedures for modifying hereditary properties of humans. Also reproductive cloning of humans is forbidden in Finland (Medical Research Act, 488/1999). Therapeutic cloning, a group of cells produced through somatic cell nuclear transfer technique, is not prohibited in Finland, since according to section 2 of the Medical Research Act an embryo means "a living group of cells resulting from fertilisation".

There are several embryonic stem cell lines that are used in Finland for research and that have been produced from embryos left over from fertilisation treatments after the gamete donors have given their written informed consent on the use of the em-

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bryos in medical research. Furthermore, a research institution needs the permission of the National Authority for Medicolegal Affairs for research involving embryos. Embryonic stem cells are used in the basic research on serious diseases. In the future, research will be also carried out with a view to the treatment of persons suffering from these diseases. In order to ensure that the possible new innovations produced as a result of the research can be used in the future for the treatment of persons suffering from serious diseases of humankind it should be possible to carry out research involving both adult-type stem cells and embryonic stem cells within precisely defined frameworks. In Finland, the ethically acceptable limits are defined as referred to above in our legislation. Referring to what has been said above the Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics supports funding the research involving embryonic stem cells from EU funds.

Paula Kokkonen
Chairperson
Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics

Ritva Halila
General Secretary