

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 1 With the relevant scientific, ethical, social and legal issues in mind, the BAC embarked on an extensive consultation process, to further understand all aspects of the subject matter, and more importantly, to understand the concerns and sentiments of local interest groups and the general public. The consultation process enabled the BAC to obtain very comprehensive information, especially on theological, social and cultural sensitivities, for the purposes of its deliberations. The process is described below.

#### *Consultation with Experts*

- 2 The BAC recognised that advice from experts was necessary in the search for balanced decisions. The BAC identified a panel of seven local experts, which comprised scientists and sociologists, and commissioned them to provide papers on the subject in the local context within their areas of expertise. The scientists were asked to discuss the type and extent of research currently conducted in Singapore, and the technical advances and constraints which they faced. In addition, the scientists and sociologists were asked to provide input on the ethical, legal and social issues that could arise from such research.
- 3 The list of commissioned papers and the experts consulted are as follows, and the commissioned papers are attached at **Annex E**:

(a) 'Adult Stem Cells'

Dr Hanry Yu, Associate Professor, Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, NUS; Dr Karen Chong Mei Teck, Registrar, Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, National Heart Centre; A/P James Goh, Research Director, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, National University of Singapore.

(b) 'Umbilical Cord Stem Cell – Science'

Prof Ng Soon Chye, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

(c) 'Human Embryonic Stem Cells – Science & Ethics'

Prof Ariff Bongso, Research Professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

(d) 'Ethical Considerations in Stem Cell Research'

A/P John Elliott, Department of Social Work & Psychology, National University of Singapore.

(e) 'Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (Cloning) – Science & Ethics'

Prof Ng Soon Chye, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine.

(f) 'Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis'

Dr Christine Yap, Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Singapore General Hospital.

(g) 'Legal and Ethical Issues Pertaining to Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis'

Dr Christine Yap, Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Singapore General Hospital.

4 At the same time, the BAC constituted an International Panel of Experts, comprising Dr Bernard Lo (Director, Program in Medical Ethics, University of

California, San Francisco, USA) and Professor Martin Bobrow (Head, Department of Medical Genetics, University of Cambridge, UK). The BAC was in close consultation with them to obtain objective and constructive feedback.

*Consultation with Local Interest Groups*

- 5 The BAC also recognised that engagement of local interest groups was critical. The BAC released a consultation paper on 9 November 2001 to 39 religious and professional organisations for their views. The list of the organisations consulted is attached as **Annex F**.
  
- 6 In the consultation paper, the BAC expressed its support for human stem cell research using AS cells and EG cells. On the issue of reproductive cloning of human beings, the BAC was of the firm view that this should not be allowed. The BAC would however, be prepared to support therapeutic cloning, but only if carried out under strictly defined regulations and controls, and only for the purposes of human stem cell research, and not for the purposes of creating a human embryo for reproductive cloning. This same stringent criteria and control were to apply to creating research embryos by IVF. The consultation paper also discussed research using ES cells. The BAC proposed that it would be acceptable to use ES cells obtained from early embryos, not more than 14-days old, in order to carry out serious scientific research which has the potential to benefit mankind.
  
- 7 A total of 25 written submissions were received from the religious and professional organisations and are attached as **Annex G**.
  
- 8 All 39 organisations were invited to attend dialogue sessions with the BAC. At each session, there was an opportunity for their views and concerns to be discussed and clarified. A list of the organisations and their representatives who attended the dialogue sessions is attached as **Annex H**.
  
- 9 Altogether, three dialogue sessions were held on 27 December 2001, 3 January 2002 and 7 January 2002. Three press briefings were also held to

inform the public of the progress of the BAC's consultations with the organisations.

*Consultation with the General Public*

- 10 Finally, the BAC recognised that consultation with the general public was also critical. Since August 2001, the BAC has maintained a website containing information about human stem cell research, reproductive and therapeutic cloning. Comments from the public were received through the website. Over 8500 hits were recorded since its inception.
  
- 11 On 7 December 2001, the BAC and the Feedback Unit, Ministry of Community Development and Sports, jointly held a focus group discussion session. 39 participants of different races, ages and occupations, were selected by the Feedback Unit to attend, and they provided a range of views for consideration. A report of the discussion was prepared by the Feedback Unit, which is attached as **Annex I**.
  
- 12 Finally, members of the public were invited through the mass media to furnish views, and the BAC received letters from members of the public.