

British paediatrics

Warnock Committee

The British Paediatric Association (BPA) has recently produced its response to the report of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology, chaired by Dame Mary Warnock. The Association welcomes the report but since there are differing opinions within its membership concerning the morality of artificial human fertilisation and allied techniques its comments on the report are restricted to matters on which it can give expert advice.

The BPA supports the proposal that a statutory licensing authority be established to regulate research and infertility services and considers that the membership of this body should include a paediatrician.

Some BPA members believe that all research on the embryo is unethical and should be illegal. Others agree that embryos should not be created for the purpose of research but believe that so called 'spare' embryos should, with appropriate safeguards, be used for research into the causes of congenital defects. They feel that a statutory limitation of research to 14 days after fertilisation might be unduly restrictive and advocate instead application to the licensing authority. Research on embryonic tissue as opposed to the whole embryo was not considered by the Warnock Committee but in the opinion of the BPA raises few, if any, ethical objections.

The committee recommends that the licensing authority should consider the need for registration and follow up of children born as a result of the new

techniques of fertilisation. The BPA supports this recommendation and considers it could be implemented on a strictly confidential basis and without making direct contact with the children or their families. Families must, however, have the right to opt out of the registration process.

The BPA agrees that children born from donated sperms or ova should have the right of access to the anonymous donor's ethnic origin and genetic health and that the donor should have no parental rights or duties in relation to the child.

Although it approves the recommendation that it should be accepted practice to offer donated gametes and embryos to those at risk of transmitting hereditary disorders, the BPA is concerned that this might encourage in parents an unrealistic expectation of perfect offspring.

Other recommendations approved by the BPA are funding for the collection of statistics, the establishment of specialist infertility clinics, and the need for a child born after artificial insemination by donor (AID) to be treated in law as the legitimate child of the mother and her husband, who should be registered as the father.

The BPA finally makes the plea for a greater consideration than was shown by the Warnock Committee for the emotional well being of children born as a result of modern techniques. The provision of children for childless couples should not preclude the provision, as is the case with adoption, of suitable parents for the child.