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Human Cloning Controversy Threatens Science Growth, Says IWU Biologist

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — The controversy surrounding human cloning, which resurfaced recently with a breakthrough reported by South Korean scientists, threatens to take science out of the public sector and thereby stop scientific growth, says Illinois Wesleyan experimental embryologist Bruce Criley.

Researchers at Seoul National University reported in the journal *Science* that they had successfully cloned a human embryo from the cells of a woman. That report raised anew the debate over the ethical implications of cloning human cells.

Criley says that the very fact that these advances were made by South Korean researchers points to the way in which limits placed on stem cell research in this country have put U.S. scientists at a clear disadvantage. Moreover, the lack of government funding for research in this area may push the work into the private sector where, Criley fears, the standard peer-review system used to hold scientists accountable for their results will be ignored.

"The difference is that when private funds are used, those private laboratories own the results and control the way in which the research is reported," he says.

"The essence of science is to report your findings in scientific journals and meetings and have colleagues react to it — challenging your experimental design or pointing to something you might not have considered. This is the way science proceeds and grows. The danger here is that forcing this research into the private sector stops science communication. To me, this is the most dangerous thing of all. You take science out of the public sector, and you don't know what they're doing. It becomes technology, not science."

Criley contends that the battle over reproductive cloning — i.e., using cloning techniques to produce a new human being — have been allowed to overshadow potential benefits of therapeutic cloning in which scientists use embryonic stem cells to produce cells that could, for instance, regenerate cells in damaged heart tissue.

"Reproductive cloning should be illegal. Not only would reproductive cloning, which would allow development and birth of a human, be an outrageously expensive process, but it would be an immoral process based on the evidence that we have compiled thus far," said Criley, referring to results of such publicized experiments as Dolly, the cloned sheep.

"The cloning of Dolly shows that it is possible to create a whole organism. But is that organism perfect? The answer with Dolly was plainly no. The cloned organisms seem to age faster, and their immune systems are deficient. Dolly did not live a full life. Dolly died a sick sheep. Why would you want to do this with a human being if you know it's going to cause abnormalities, premature aging, and so forth?"

With purely for-profit motives, private research groups may proceed with such reproductive cloning experiments regardless of the consequences, Criley fears. "The difference between being able to do something and actually doing it is enormous," Criley says. "There is a lot that I can do but that I wouldn't do."

To discuss the implications of the South Korean cloning experiment with Criley, contact either Ann Aubry or Jeff Hanna at 309/556-3181.