

PRESS RELEASE

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Mitochondrial donation takes us off a bioethical cliff, says LIFE

The pro-life charity LIFE has expressed utter dismay and disappointment following the House of Lords' irresponsible vote in favour of mitochondrial donation, or 'three-parent IVF', last night. The Lords voted 260-48 against an amendment moved by Lord Deben which would have stopped the government from authorising mitochondrial transfer until its safety and effectiveness had been properly established.

A LIFE spokesman, Niall Gooch, said: 'This is an irresponsible leap into the unknown. There are fundamental ethical problems with these techniques, related to the destruction of embryos and with the manipulation of human beings. But there are also huge unanswered questions about whether pronuclear transfer and maternal spindle transfer will actually work as intended without significant long-term side-effects. We are talking here about irreversible genetic modification of human individuals which could have long-term effects on the whole human race. In 2003, a research project in China, the Zhang study, tried pro-nuclear transfer in humans for the first time. It failed. The three children conceived as a result all died. Key experimental work in primates has yet to be completed.

In addition, Lord Deben was right to raise questions in the Lords about whether three-parent babies are permitted by EU law. His points have still not been properly answered, despite the concerns of top lawyers. Furthermore, 44 MEPs have written to the British government expressing concern about legalisation, and have been totally ignored.

No-one seems to have given any thought to the demands that mitochondrial donation makes on women. It was largely men who spoke in favour of the procedure in the Lords, but it is women, often poor or vulnerable women, who will be lured into 'selling' their eggs. Eggs for research have to be extracted from women through an arduous and potentially dangerous process. It is women, and their partners, who may face crushing disappointment if mitochondrial donation does not work as hoped, and women who will have to carry a child which might suffer serious disease, and who might undergo a subsequent abortion.

Britain has marched off a bioethical cliff with this vote. While we sympathise with those affected by mitochondrial disease, there are some things that we shouldn't do no matter how good the end result might be. And of course there are no guarantees that it will even work.'

END

For further media comment please call the LIFE Media Hotline on 07867 744502

LIFE is a pro-life charity that supports anyone facing a crisis pregnancy, pregnancy loss or after an abortion, and strives to engage, inspire and inform the next generation.