Statement of Opinion on the Subject of "Human Reproductive Cloning"

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Procreation is the production of offspring for plants, animals, and humans. The genetic material is hereby transferred from one generation to the next, thus preserving the species. Procreation is usually linked to the multiplication of individuals, whether in the form of the sexual procreation used by mankind, mammals, etc., or the asexual procreation used by plants, bacteria, viruses, etc. Each method of procreation has its particular advantages. Cloning is a means of asexual procreation. Cloning may therefore be considered as a natural procedure, which is identical to the asexual procreation of certain species and plants. The current public criticism results from a lack of information about this fact. In effect, cloning simply represents a further addition to the spectrum of procreation methods available to the human species. Fertility disorders exist that cannot be treated with the IVF methods currently in use. For a very small percentage of all couples who are unable to conceive a baby in the normal way, cloning represents the only remaining hope.

Prof. Antinori's (Rome, Italy) announcement that he intends to start a program of human reproductive cloning before the end of 2001 triggered an avalanche of media opinion on the subject. Many reports depicted a truly horrific scenario, which has ultimately given me cause to bring my own point of view on the subject into the discussion:

I fundamentally advocate the freedom of research and of science. The emotional, subjective accusations that are currently being leveled against research

and science, such as, for instance, "scientific megalomania," "criminal experiment," or similar, are completely unjustified. The recent reservations expressed by researchers into cloning in the veterinary sector are not unconditionally valid. Veterinary research into IVF is still a long way behind human reproductive medicine. In experiments on laboratory animals' inbred strains are frequently used, which involve a high likelihood of abnormal development to start with. This might be a reason for the much-quoted high rate of malformations recorded in cloning experiments on animals. A further reason may also be that genetic screening tests on embryos and fetuses (routine in humans) are usually not carried out in animal experiments. In many animal species, in vitro fertilization has a poor success rate (this also explains why a great number of oocytes are "consumed" in animal experiments). At any rate, the results of animal experiments cannot be transferred 100% to humans.

The unfavorable results of animal tests were used back in the seventies as arguments against the use of IVF in humans. Its routine application today shows, of course, that these arguments were unjustified.

In my opinion, the discussion of this subject at a scientific level is of eminent importance. Horror scenarios in the media only serve to impede this discussion. In the event that the scientific discussion should ultimately lead to the decision that research into human reproductive cloning should be discontinued, then of course this decision should also be respected. On my part there exists no intention whatsoever to force ahead this method of reproduction. It goes without saying that no cloning experiments are carried out by me or at my institute. Law in Austria forbids cloning, and for this reason alone such experiments are out of the question as far as we are concerned. Furthermore, my institute possesses neither the facilities nor the

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highly specialized knowledge required for research of this kind.

As the founder and President of A Part, the worldwide association of private clinics for reproductive medicine, I can tell you that the issue of “reproductive cloning” was discussed during our last world congress. Our members hold various points of view on the subject, an internal study showed that 75.8% of all our members would advocate reproductive cloning under certain conditions (1). An open discussion and a

declaration regarding potential planned projects, as given by Prof. Antinori and Prof. Zavos, is at any rate preferable to the conducting of experiments in secret.

REFERENCE

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