



Perspectives

The deVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research

Autumn 2012

Research and Scholarship for an Informed Social Response to Human Life Questions



The Deadly Debate: Physician-Assisted Suicide on Trial

Leading bioethicist Margaret Somerville to address the current situation

Physician-assisted suicide is in the news again, as British Columbia wrestles with the legal language and situation concerning its ban.

People who support assisted suicide argue it is a necessary means to relieve pain and suffering, and required to respect a person's autonomy and dignity, writes Margaret Somerville, a highly renowned bio-ethicist, in her article "How do we want our great-great grandchildren to die?" published in *The Globe and Mail* on June 16th, 2012.

Surely our response to such fears shouldn't be an offer to help them kill themselves.

However, many people who request it "are fearful of being abandoned – dying alone and unloved – and of being a burden to others," she adds. "Surely our response to such fears shouldn't be an offer to help them kill themselves."

Margaret Somerville is the Founding Director of the Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law at McGill University. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and among her many other honours and awards are the Order of Australia and the UNESCO Avicenna Prize for Ethics in Science. Somerville has published *Public Health and Epidemiology at a Glance*, *The Ethical Canary: Science, Society, and the Human Spirit*, and *Death Talk: The Case Against Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide*.

Upcoming Lecture

The Deadly Debate: Physician-Assisted Suicide on Trial

Featuring Margaret Somerville

Thursday, November 22, 2012, 7:30 pm

FREE!

Location: Charbonnel Lounge, 81 St. Mary's Street,
St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, M5S 1J4.

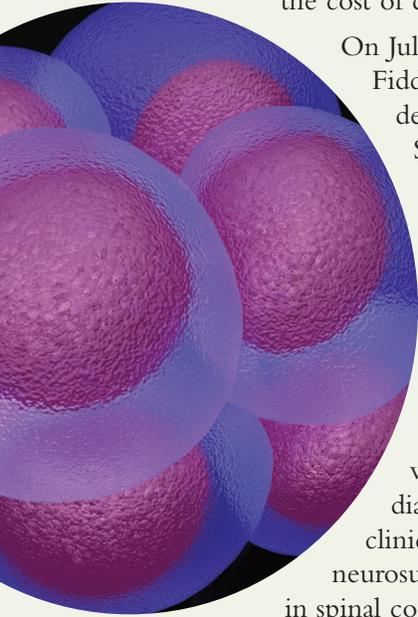
This event is co-hosted by the University of Toronto Students for Life.

The lecture is free, but seating is limited and attendance by RSVP only. To book your seat, contact the office at 416-256-0555, or email bioethics@deveber.org

The Hype, the Hope and the Reality: Are stem cells saving lives?

Adult versus Embryonic Stem Cell debate may become “obsolete”

Stem cell therapies have vast potential to treat and cure previously untreatable and incurable diseases, saving countless lives. However, should a life be saved at the cost of destroying another?



On July 3rd at the Fox and the Fiddle pub in Toronto, the deVeber Institute hosted a Café Scientifique to debate these contemporary ethical issues. Thanks to event sponsor the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the evening explored the issues in depth.

Expert panelists included Dr. David Hill, whose present work focuses on treating diabetes, Dr. Michael Fehlings, a clinician and researcher in neurosurgery particularly interested in spinal cord injury, and stem cell transplant patient Lorraine McCallum, Development Associate for the deVeber Institute. Moderator, Bridget Campion, bioethicist and deVeber Advisor skillfully clarified and opened discussion for over 80 guests.

Days after giving birth to her third daughter, Lorraine McCallum was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable blood cancer of the plasma cells in the bone marrow. Autologous stem cell transplants – using the patient’s own stem cells – are standard practice in multiple myeloma patients after chemotherapy. “The transplant keeps the cancer at bay,” she said. “And the main advantage of using my own stem cells, of course, is that you don’t have the risk of host rejection.”

Attendees at the Café discovered that the most current research is heading in a direction that may make the debate over embryonic stem cell research vs. adult stem cell research obsolete, according to Dr. Michael Fehlings. However, the discussion surrounding stem cell therapies still requires probing deeper into the actual techniques scientists use. *

* Summer intern, Café planner and attendee, Aleshia Johnson has summarized the ethical implications of various types of stem cells. This report is available online and for copies call 416-256-0555 or bioethics@deveber.org or visit www.deveber.org



Whereas embryonic stem cell therapies have been hyped, the real progress has come from adult stem cell research

Comment

Dr. Paul Ranalli, a neurologist, attendee, and deVeber Advisor pointed out that there remains both ethical and practical concerns about embryonic stem cell research. “To date, embryonic stem cell applications success in humans is zero,” he said. “Of course, there is always hope in the scientist about potential, and those who do not consider human life to exist at this stage will continue to pursue work in the field. Fortunately, adult stem cells already provide real success in human applications in over two dozen clinical conditions.”

Misconceptions: Artificial Fertility Treatments Come at a Big Price

By Elaine Zettel, Midwifery Student reporting on Restorative Reproductive Health Conference



“We live in a world where we assume that we can plan all aspects of our lives”, noted Elizabeth Ring-Cassidy at a spring conference in Banff, Alberta earlier this year on restorative reproductive health. “For infertile couples, the inability to control their reproduction provides a dimension of uncertainty.”

Ring-Cassidy, Senior Researcher at the deVeber Institute, and developmental psychologist, noted that this loss of control can leave people feeling desperate to do whatever it takes to have a child. Grief is common in both women and men in these situations.¹

“Loss of control (in fertility) can leave people feeling desperate to do whatever it takes to have a child.”

With Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART), pregnancies often result in multiples in the womb. Multi-fetal pregnancy reduction (abortion of several of the fetuses so that one remains to come to term) is usually recommended by ART experts. However, these selective abortions are often met with intense grief by parents who have become attached to their long-awaited child.²

The psychological burdens of infertility and of these treatments are largely understudied. Ring-Cassidy pointed out that methods using a restorative reproductive health approach have brought fertility results without the complications and issues of ART.

Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM) is any scientific approach to reproductive medicine that seeks to cooperate with or restore the normal physiology and anatomy of the human reproductive system. It does not employ methods that are inherently suppressive, circumventive or destructive,³ instead it includes empowering women with a knowledge of their individual times of fertility, in addition to medical, hormonal and surgical techniques to restore the body’s reproductive system to health.

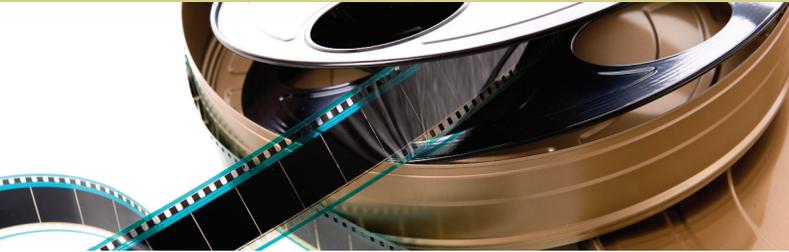
For more information on this and to view Elizabeth Ring-Cassidy’s complete presentation, please visit www.deveber.org

1. Volgsten H, Svanberg AS, Ekselius L, Lundkvist O, PoromaalS. Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in infertile women and men undergoing in vitro fertilization treatment. *Hum Reprod* 2008; 23(9): 2056-2063.
2. Grill, E. Psychosocial Aspects of Multi-fetal Pregnancy Reduction. www.iaac.ca/content/psychosocial-aspects-multi-fetal-pregnancy-reduction. Fall 2006.
3. International Institute of Restorative Reproductive Medicine. <http://www.iirm.org/>

Do you want to volunteer?

Contact the deVeber Institute today, we want you on our team! Call **416-256-0555** or email us at bioethics@deveber.org

First Ever deVeber Youth Film Festival on Life Issues



“These young film artists may very well be tomorrow’s award winners and... artists for the masses. This is why I am most pleased to assist.”

Frank D’Angelo, President of The Messengers International, and premier sponsor of the deVeber Film Festival

Our youth of today are our leaders of tomorrow. At deVeber, we hope to strengthen their optimism about change, and ignite their passion on issues that matter.

We are pleased to be able to present our first national film festival on life issues, including a significant cash prize for the winners (thanks to our donors).

Any young person will be eligible to enter their films based on deVeber research. The best will be posted to our new Youth Website, for voting. Winners will

be announced in spring 2013 and invited to our awards ceremony.

Andrea Settimi, summer intern who worked on the Film Festival, says that **“We can build a reality of courageous youth advocating the importance of human life.”**

Watch our website for details, or add your email to our mailing list at bioethics@deveber.org

Our work has come a long way, but we need your help!

We continue to push the boundaries and areas of research with topics that affect us, our families and our communities. From free talks on stem cells, to hosting experts on palliative care and euthanasia and our continued extensive exploration

of how abortion affects women – we continue to bring research that matters. We can attribute our success only to one person: YOU, our donors, our life-line. You allow our work to continue thanks to your donations.

Please note our new mailing address.



The deVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research

Founded in 1982

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