

Commission recommends federal ban on human cloning

It would allow research but not implantation

By PAUL RECER
Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — Cloning a human being is "morally unacceptable," a federal commission said yesterday, recommending legislation that would ban such cloning experiments. But it said laws should allow research using cells of humans and animals.

"We believe it would violate important ethical obligations were clinicians or researchers to attempt to create a child" using techniques that Scottish scientists used to clone a sheep, the National Bioethics Advisory Commission said in a report tacked together and approved yesterday.

The 18-member presidential commission said its consensus on the ban was based on worries that techniques used in creating Dolly the sheep — the first mammal to be cloned using cells from an adult — would be unsafe and perhaps ineffective in humans.

The commission said Dolly's birth came after 277 failures, including many lambs born with fatal birth defects.

"We have hung our hat on the safety issue," said Dr. Lawrence Mücke, one of the commissioners and director of Hawaii's department of health.

The commission recommended, however, that any law have a "sunset clause" to expire in three to five years and force the nation to re-examine the question when the science of cloning may have improved.

The commission urged President Clinton to continue a ban on using federal money for research into human cloning and asked scientists in private research to comply voluntarily with a federal ban.

"Professional and scientific societies should make clear that any attempt to create a child . . . would at this time be an irresponsible, unethical and unprofessional act," the commission said.

It also urged that any laws on cloning "be carefully written so as not to interfere with other important areas

THE REPORT AT A GLANCE

COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS

"It is morally unacceptable for anyone in the public or private sector . . . to attempt to create a child" using cloning techniques.

A commission consensus was reached because of worries about "the safety . . . of this method in humans," because the mammal cloning technique as performed on a Scottish sheep poses "substantial risk to the fetus and/or potential child."

There also are "serious ethical concerns" that require "much more widespread and careful public deliberation before this technology may be used."

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue a ban on federal funding of human cloning research and request that private laboratories comply voluntarily.

- Ensure that scientific societies make clear that an attempt to produce a child through cloning at this time would "be an irresponsible, unethical and unprofessional act."

- Establish new federal laws to prohibit any attempt to create a child through cloning using the technique of transferring a nucleus from a mature cell.

- Include a "sunset clause" in laws on the subject that would cause the legislation to expire and force society to re-examine the issue in three to five years in light of improvements in the science.

- Write the laws carefully so as not to interfere with human cloning research that stops short of producing a baby but that might advance medical science. The laws also should not interfere with research in the cloning of animals.

of scientific research."

Some members of Congress said the commission's report failed to settle the issue and leaves loopholes for unbridled cloning research.

"They are leaving the door wide open to future cloning," said Sen. Christopher Bond, R-Mo. "I had hoped that the federal ethics commission would not be afraid to make a strong moral statement that human cloning is wrong, period, and should be banned."

Commission member Alexander Capron, a professor of law at the University of Southern California, said the recommendations' intent was to forbid implantation of a cloned egg into a woman's uterus. But he said the commission would allow any cloning research to continue that stops short of actual implantation.

The head of an anti-abortion group said that creates "two grave evils."

John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, director of the American Bioethics Advisory

Commission — a part of the American Life League — said that by permitting cloning research but forbidding implantation, the commission would permit the making of human embryos that must die.

"This means it is OK to clone as long as you kill," he said.

Dolly's cloning, announced Feb. 24, prompted legislators to propose laws to forbid human cloning. Several European countries passed such laws, but Clinton assigned the bioethics commission to study the subject and make recommendations. He said new laws should await the commission's report, which will be delivered to the White House tomorrow.

The procedure's safety is only part of the consideration, said commission Chairman Harold Shapiro, president of Princeton University.

"The safety issue is key and compelling, but I feel it is quite important that there are unresolved issues on the ethical and moral side," he said.