



Messaging Fetal Tissue Research

Event

Community Conversation “Precious Gifts: The Stewardship of Fetal Tissue Research,” hosted by Northwest Association for Biomedical Research (NWABR). NWABR is a non-profit bioscience education organization. Our mission is to strengthen public trust in biomedical research and its ethical conduct.

March 21st, Location provided upon registration which is not yet open.

For more information and suggested readings please visit www.nwabr.org/conversation/spokane or contact engagement@nwabr.org

NWABR’s Key Talking Points

1. **Human fetal tissue is any tissue or cells that come from a dead human fetus** aged from the end of the 8th week of pregnancy forward, obtained after a spontaneous or induced abortion, or after a stillbirth.
2. **Fetal tissue is important for medical research** because fetal cells multiply rapidly and many are not yet programmed—and are therefore flexible for many uses. It is a rare resource. Research focuses on understanding, preventing, treating and curing:
 - a. infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS
 - b. abnormal fetal development and disease
 - c. serious diseases like macular degeneration, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s
3. **Fetal tissue research is legal in the United States and is highly regulated** at the federal, state and organizational level.
 - a. Human tissue, including fetal tissue, cannot be sold for profit; it is legal to be financially reimbursed to cover the costs incurred from transporting, implanting, processing, preserving, quality control, or storage of human fetal tissue (42 US Code 274e). For example, a University of Washington lab charges researchers a flat fee of \$200 a day to process and ship tissue (Seattle Times).
 - b. Human fetal tissue can be used for transplantation research for therapeutic purposes (42 US code 289g).
4. **Fetal tissue research is not a new kind of research**, but has occurred since the 1930’s. Fetal tissue research contributed to the development of vaccines, including for polio. The work was awarded the 1954 Nobel Prize in Medicine. National Institutes of Health (NIH) spent \$76 million in FY2014 on FTR (compared to \$6 million on hay fever for example).
5. Regarding the “Planned Parenthood Scandal,” there are specific talking points.
 - a. In 2015 a series of undercover videos were released that feature conversations between Planned Parenthood, StemExpress and **fake** tissue procurement company Biomax Procurement Services “staff.” The series was filmed secretly by pro-life group Center for Medical Progress (CFMP).

- b. Through the heavily edited and misleading videos, **Planned Parenthood was accused of illegally selling body parts from aborted fetuses**. Multiple congressional and state investigations found **no evidence to this end**. Because PP recovers their costs, but does not financially benefit from giving fetal tissue directly to research hospitals or to third parties like StemExpress, this accusation is refuted.
 - c. **PP was accused of changing the standard procedure for abortion** in order to better preserve these body parts, which is illegal (“no alteration of the timing, method, or procedures used to terminate the pregnancy was made solely for the purposes of obtaining the tissue”42 US code 289 sec 498A).
 - d. **Discussing fetal death requires respect**. Several ethicists agree with the public’s reaction that what was troubling about these videos, whether misleading or not, is the “cavalier” manner in which the PP staff spoke about abortion.
6. **Fetal tissue research and fetal tissue donation is contentious**. Fetal tissue comes from either aborted or miscarried fetuses or stillbirths. This tissue is only kept for research purposes following the informed consent of donating woman.
7. That some fetal tissue is derived from aborted fetuses ties into the national debate on abortion and reproductive rights.
- a. Some people find it difficult to separate fetal tissue research from the national abortion debate. People who feel that abortion is wrong also often believe that using tissue from an aborted fetus is wrong.
 - b. Some people who are opposed to abortion support FTR because they see the public good that can be achieved.
 - c. Key ethical principles in conflict are a woman’s autonomy regarding her own body, the moral value of an unborn fetus and the ethics of utilizing an unborn fetus’ tissue when it does not have a say in the matter.
8. By hosting this Conversation, NWABR’s goal is to create a safe space to have a factual, honest and respectful conversation about fetal tissue research. Scientists and the public want to discuss it, but we are struggling to find a starting point. Naturally people will have different perspectives from one another. We want to have the courageous conversation. Join us!

References

Katz, B. Unpacking the Planned Parenthood Controversy. *The New York Times*.
<http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/07/24/unpacking-the-planned-parenthood-controversy/>

United States Public Health Service Act Code 42. *Legal Information Institute*.
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/search/site/42>

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http://o.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/health/2027222944_fetaltissuexml.html

2015. National Institutes of Health. https://report.nih.gov/categorical_spending.aspx#