

## Is UK's '3-parent IVF' approval up to ethical standards?

A lengthy and consequential policy process in the UK has now come to an end. Despite what could turn out to be insurmountable legal and safety hurdles, on February 24 the United Kingdom legalized the use of nuclear genome transfer, also known as “3-person IVF” or “mitochondrial donation,” a suite of techniques that combine genetic material from two eggs or embryos causing inheritable alterations to the human germline.

The understandable goal of these techniques is to prevent the maternal transmission of certain kinds of rare mitochondrial diseases. However, as CGS pointed out in a statement following the news, using experimental biotechnologies to bring a new person into the world is a very different prospect from using them to help someone alive today. Unlike a gene therapy that only impacts the single consenting individual, manipulations of gametes and embryos create permanent changes to the human germline that are passed on to future generations. This trans-generational experimentation is a dimension of the risk/benefit ratio that regulators have never dealt with explicitly before. And it's a big part of why germline modification is prohibited in over 40 countries and by multiple human rights treaties.

It is not encouraging that this decision was made despite the fact that scientists from around the world warned that the techniques could well cause more problems than they solve, and that an early pioneer of their development, David L. Keefe, MD, abandoned them because he believes they are too dangerous for any resulting children. In a letter to the senior policy officer of the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), Keefe, chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at NYU Langone Medical Center, explains that there is already a safer alternative available for women who want to have a healthy, genetically related child.

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