

## Can human germline genetic modification research proceed with ethics in mind?

I have been following the reports about genetic editing technology with concern. The fact that some scientists are calling for moratoria on gene editing of human embryos heartens me. Frankly, I had little confidence that any group of scientists could bring themselves to call for limits on research. The call for a moratorium is as much a game changer as the technology itself. It creates an opportunity for research transparency and open exchange between the scientific community and the lay public. Germline modification raises a wide range of scientific, social and ethical issues that we have only begun to consider. The call for a moratorium puts those issues front and center and, if implemented, gives us valuable time for consideration.

In the meantime, as Paul Knoepfler has pointed out, we need is a practical plan for proceeding. His [ABCD plan](#) proposes use of SCROs for approval and oversight of *in vitro* research. The use of existing oversight mechanisms makes sense, although in practice, both IRB and SCRO review is only as rigorous as local institutional culture allows.

As a bioethics scholar and teacher, I find the bioethics training appealing, fascinating, and daunting, given the wide range of potential issues. I'm glad to see that Paul Knoepfler has flagged sourcing of human oocytes as one issue. In the fertility context, human oocytes are procured through a largely unregulated and rapidly expanding market. The process of soliciting young women to provide oocytes for others' use is often degrading and expresses eugenic ideals. (See my recent blogpost [here](#)). Federal guidelines and a few state laws prohibit payment to research donors. But I worry that the notion of free market individualism used to explain treating women as sources of raw materials and exposing healthy young women to the risks of ovarian stimulation and oocyte retrieval is being used in research, as well. Do we really want to superimpose market thinking on human beings, in the name of science?

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