

Is slippery slope argument against human embryo gene editing overblown?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

“It is up to society to decide what is acceptable: science will merely inform what may be possible.” This statement [made by Kathy Niakan](#), a stem cell researcher at the newly opened [Francis Crick Institute](#) in London, seems eminently reasonable, but it raises as many questions as it allays.

Niakan has applied to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority for a licence to use a powerful new gene-editing technique on human embryos that would produce the first genetically modified embryos in the UK. Such a step is currently banned for federally funded research in the U.S.

If Niakan is permitted to proceed, the embryos – donated from IVF treatment and modified using a method called [Crispr/Cas9](#), which makes it relatively straightforward to snip out genes and insert new ones – would legally have to be destroyed within 14 days. The work would explore the genetic roots of repeated miscarriage by examining the layer of cells in the embryo that develop into the placenta.

Niakan refutes suggestions that the work would set us on a slippery slope towards designer babies. She is absolutely right. Regulation is very clear and tight in the UK, even while being permissive by global standards. Indeed, it's a willingness to confront and think through the issues that has made the HFEA an admired and trusted model for regulating embryo research.

Read full, original post: [Scientists must be part of the ethical debate on human genetics](#)