



LIFEalerts

Doctors For Life International's Bi-Weekly Update on Current Ethical Issues

LIFEalerts 01 June 2011

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Abortion

USA - Senate approves bill to require sonogram before abortion

A sonogram bill that would require women seeking an abortion to hear a detailed description of their fetus, as well as be presented images and heartbeats, won Senate approval. Women could opt out of seeing the sonogram or listening to a heartbeat, if it is detectable, but almost all would have to listen to a doctor outline what organs and extremities have developed. "It will be one of the strongest bills in the nation for informed consent," said author Senator Dan Patrick. Advocates for abortion rights criticized the bill as subjecting women to more hurdles and hardships and questioned government's role in dictating what a doctor must do and say with a patient. Under the bill, all women would be required to have a sonogram within 24 hours before the abortion procedure, even if they recently had the test. A daylong wait would then be required, before the abortion could be performed.

<http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/texas-legislature/headlines/20110502-senate-oks-bill-to-require-sonogram-before-abortion.ece>

USA - House passes historic ban on taxpayer funding for abortion

The House voted 251-175 to pass the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, which makes permanent and universal the annually-approved Hyde amendment. In its current form, the Hyde amendment, which bans federal funding for abortion except in cases of rape and incest, requires annual approval. The bill was authored by veteran pro-life leader Republican Chris Smith and sported at least 227 co-sponsors by the time of the vote. However, the bill is expected to meet with stiffer odds in the Democrat-led Senate, which in March struck down a measure to de-fund abortion giant Planned Parenthood. President Obama has already threatened to veto the act. Enacting this legislation would provide the American people with the assurance that their hard-earned tax dollars will not be used to fund abortions.

http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/breaking-house-passes-no-taxpayer-funding-for-abortion-act-251-75?utm_source=LifeSiteNews.com+Daily+Newsletter&utm_campaign=1f391c821f-LifeSiteNews_com_Intl_Headlines05_04_2011&utm_medium=email

South Africa - 'Mandatory' contraception for 12-year-olds

The youth wing of South Africa's ruling political party is proposing that the country make "initiation" into contraception mandatory for girls as young as twelve as part of an effort to cut teen pregnancies. The proposal would likely involve hormonal contraceptives such as the pill, which remains popular despite being labeled a carcinogen by the World Health Organization. The pill has also been linked, especially when introduced at early ages, to infertility as well as lethal blood clots, heart attacks, and strokes. Katharine Hall, senior researcher for the Children's Institute at UCT, says the proposal could contravene the Children's Act. Hall observed that 12-year-olds already have access to contraception under the Act, and questioned making it "mandatory". "The Youth League's discussion paper calls for increased access to abortion, an "expansion of youth friendly [abortion] services."

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/make-contraception-mandatory-for-12-year-old-girls-youth-wing-of-south-afri>

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Alternative Medicine

China - Traditional Chinese Medicine to be outlawed in European Union

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatments will be outlawed in European Union countries starting in May. Under the EU legislation, named the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products

Directive, all traditional herbal medicines that have not received official approval will be pulled off store shelves. The requirement to provide academic proof, such as the results of a large-scale clinical study, to show that a TCM product had been in use in the EU for at least 15 years, was another major barrier to getting products registered. Other factors, like whether the production of the medicine harms wildlife and the fact that TCM medicines sometimes contain excessive levels of heavy metals and pesticides, as well as reports about adverse reactions, have also affected the chances of TCM products being officially recognized in the EU, Huang Jianyin, deputy secretary-general of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies noted.

<http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20110414-273545.html>

South Africa - Male body parts top of the witchcraft list

Male genitalia are the most sought-after human body part for use in harmful traditional practices, including witchcraft, in South Africa and Mozambique. This is according to a research report released by the Mozambican Human Rights League in partnership with Childline South Africa in Durban. According to the research project's manager, Simon Fellows, the vast majority of mutilations, 89 percent, took place in Mozambique. However, 75 percent of the parts removed from a body ended up in South Africa. He said many participants in the research believed the body parts were to be sold or used for activities relating to witchcraft, muti (medicine) or harmful traditional practices. "The belief was that the use of body parts in muti was to create powerful traditional medicine based partly on human body parts," said Fellows.

<http://www.themercury.co.za/male-genitalia-top-of-the-witchcraft-list-1.1065155>

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Cloning

No news today

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Euthanasia

Switzerland - Swiss vote against ban on suicide tourism

A proposal to restrict access to foreigners for assisted suicide, to those living at least one year in a canton was rejected by 78.4% of voters. Under Swiss law it is legal to assist a person to commit suicide as long as the helper has no vested interest in the death. It is legal to procure lethal medication for another person but not to administer it. About 200 people commit assisted suicide each year in Zurich. Dignitas, the only Swiss association that helps applicants from abroad commit suicide, has so far accompanied 1,138 people in taking their own lives. Of these cases, 592 came from Germany, 160 from Britain, 118 from Switzerland, 102 from France, 19 from Italy, 18 from the United States and 16 from Spain.

<http://pjsaunders.blogspot.com/2011/05/swiss-vote-shows-that-british-suicide.html>

Australia - 'Brain dead' woman recovers after husband refuses to withdraw life support

An Australian woman who was declared "brain dead" regained consciousness after weeks of the family fighting doctors recommendations that her ventilator be shut off. Fifty-six-year-old Gloria Cruz was rushed to Royal Darwin Hospital in the Northern Territory of Australia on March 7, after having a stroke in her sleep. When a CAT scan revealed that Cruz was most likely suffering from a brain tumor, she underwent surgery in what initially appeared to be an unsuccessful attempt to save her life. Three days later, Gloria Cruz astounded the medical experts and awoke from her coma. According to her husband, she is now alert, mobile, and on her way to recovery.

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/brain-dead-woman-recovers-after-husband-refuses-to-withdraw-life-support>

USA - The "New Dr. Death"?

A couple of years back, the now 83-year-old Dr. Lawrence Egbert had already been dubbed "The New Doctor Death" by Newsweek, after being criminally charged in two states. Egbert says he has helped direct the deaths of nearly 300 people across the country and been personally present for nearly 100 deaths, including a handful in Baltimore. Seeing assisted suicide as a "civil right," Egbert said that it's not his role to determine whether it was a rational request. "We're saying it's rational given the givens she's suffering with," he said. "We assume a person is doing something that makes sense to them."

<http://www.nationalrighttolifeneews.org/news/2011/05/the-%E2%80%9Cnew-dr-death%E2%80%9D/>

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Gambling

No news today

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HIV / AIDS & STI's

USA - HIV infection linked to higher risk of urinary tract symptoms in men

Results from a recent study indicate that HIV infection is associated with a higher risk of lower urinary tract symptoms in men, regardless of age and other risk factors. The chances of severe urinary tract problems are greatest in HIV-positive men with a history of AIDS. The researchers noted that all study participants were self-identified men who have sex with men, and the findings may not be applicable to HIV-positive men who have sex with women only. Possible risk factors for lower urinary tract problems in HIV-positive men include chronic urinary tract infections, use of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), opportunistic infections, and direct effects of HIV on the nervous system. Results showed that more HIV-positive men had moderate or severe lower urinary tract symptoms (33.2 percent and 11.4 percent, respectively) compared to HIV-negative men (29.2 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively). The researchers suggested that future studies investigate the relationship between HAART and lower urinary tract symptoms in men with HIV.

<http://www.aidsbeacon.com/news/2011/04/22/hiv-aids-infection-linked-to-higher-risk-of-urinary-tract-symptoms-in-men>

USA - Philadelphia gives condoms to 11-year-olds

With the largest rate of teens having sex in the country and the fifth-highest HIV/AIDS rate in that age group, Philadelphia has launched a campaign to reverse those trends with a website that offers mail-order condoms to children as young as 11. A similar effort in Provincetown, Mass, last year stirred up vigorous protest from parents when the school board made condoms available to children of all ages, as long as they went to a school counsellor and asked. After the uproar, officials limited access to fifth-graders and up -- or those 11 and older. But so far in Philadelphia, the parental reaction has been minimal, according to city health department spokesman Jeff Moran. A website provides information on sexually transmitted disease and where to go for help, as well as straight talk and explicit illustrations on how to use a condom. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention also show Philadelphia has the fifth highest HIV/AIDS infection rate.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/philadelphia-kids-young-11-condoms-nations-highest-teen/story?id=13373272&page=1>

USA - Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS with humanized BLT mice

A new study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine further validates the use of humanized BLT mice in the fight to block HIV transmission. The "BLT" name is derived from the fact that these designer mice are created one at a time by introducing human bone marrow, liver and thymus tissues into animals without an immune system of their own. Humanized BLT mice have a fully functioning human immune system and can be infected with HIV in the same manner as humans. In a study published online in the *Journal of Virology*,

Denton and colleagues provide data that validates humanized BLT mice as a preclinical experimental system that potentially can be used to develop and test the effectiveness of experimental HIV prevention approaches and topical microbicides. The researchers tested six additional microbicide drug candidates for their ability to prevent HIV transmission. These experimental compounds, not yet tested in people, interfere with the virus' ability to reproduce. Partial or complete protection was shown by all but one of these drug candidates. Based on these positive results, Denton said these inhibitor drugs warrant serious consideration for future testing in people.

http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110518121246.htm?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+sciencedaily%2Fhealth_medicine%2Fhiv_and_aids+%28ScienceDaily%3A+Health+%26+Medicine+News+--+HIV+and+AIDS%29

USA - Monkey HIV vaccine 'effective', say researchers

A new vaccine can protect macaques against the monkey equivalent of HIV and could provide a fresh approach to an HIV vaccine, a study suggests. US researchers say the vaccine offered protection to 13 of 24 rhesus macaques treated in the experiment. In 12 of the monkeys, the vaccine was still effective 12 months later. They claim the work, published in the journal Nature, could "significantly contribute" to the development of an effective HIV/Aids vaccine. The researchers gave 24 healthy rhesus macaques a vaccine containing a genetically modified form of the virus, rhesus cytomegalovirus (CMV). In 13 of the monkeys, the vaccine appeared to offer protection against simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), the monkey equivalent of HIV. Of these 13, 12 monkeys were still protected one year later. Researchers in the field welcomed the study, but said safety issues would need to be addressed before similar approaches could be tried in humans.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-13362927>

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Homosexuality

USA - Tennessee Considers Banning Teaching Homosexuality in Elementary Schools

The state Senate will soon vote on a bill, known as "Don't Say Gay," that would prohibit educators from "the teaching or furnishing of materials on human sexuality other than heterosexuality in public school grades K-8. The author of the bill, state Sen. Stacey Campfield, said his bill aims to stop homosexual-rights activists from pushing their agenda in the classroom. In California, schools have addressed topics such as homosexual households, homophobia and sexual orientation for years in an effort to battle anti-homosexual discrimination. Children as young as 5 are taught about homosexual issues in some school districts, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what's coming," Campfield said.

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/04/26/tennessee-considers-banning-teaching-homosexuality-elementary-schools/?test=latestnews>

USA - Homosexual men report higher cancer rates

A large study in California released recently, has found that cancer may be nearly twice as prevalent among homosexual men as among straight men. The study relied on self-reported data from the California Health Interview survey, the largest state survey of its kind in the United States, and included more than 120 000 people over three years: 2001, 2003 and 2005. A total of 3 690 men reported a cancer diagnosis as adults. Homosexual men were 1.9 times as likely as straight men to have been diagnosed with cancer said the study published in the peer-reviewed journal Cancer. There was no such difference witnessed among lesbian and straight women, but homosexual and bisexual females were twice as likely to say they were in fair or poor health after a cancer diagnosis compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

<http://www.news24.com/SciTech/News/Gay-men-report-higher-cancer-rates-20110509>

USA - US Navy back peddles on "gay marriage" ceremonies

Following an uproar after the Office of the Chief of Navy Chaplains authorized navy chaplains to perform same-sex "marriages" in naval chapels, Chief of Navy Chaplains, Rear Adm. Mark Tidd issued a one-sentence memo lately, reversing the directive. The original decision to allow the ceremonies was motivated by the pending repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), the 17-year-old ban on open homosexuals serving in the military. That repeal was signed into law by President Barack Obama in December, but cannot go into effect until 60 days after the president and his senior defense advisers certify that lifting the ban would not hurt troops' unit cohesion and military order. This has not yet taken place. More than 60 House members wrote to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus this week to object to the Navy's initial ruling, saying the service was violating the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act by appearing to recognize and support same-sex "marriages," according to an Associated Press report. In the new memo Rear Adm. Tidd said that he had "suspended until further notice" his earlier decision, "pending additional legal and policy review and interdepartmental coordination." The first memo, titled Revision of Chaplain Corps Tier 1 DADT Repeal Training, indicated that same-sex ceremonies would be allowed at military facilities such as chapels and mess halls following DADT repeal, but only in states that already recognize same-sex unions.

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/us-navy-backpaddles-on-gay-marriage-ceremonies>

USA - Presbyterian Church USA to allow gay and lesbian clergy

The Presbyterian Church of the USA has recently voted to allow the ordination of openly homosexual and lesbian ministers. The church put the vote to its 173 presbyteries, or governing bodies, nationwide.

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/05/10/presbyterian.gay.lesbian.ordination/index.html?hpt=Sbin>

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In Vitro Fertilization

USA - Costa Rica must legalize IVF or face penalties: human rights commission

Costa Rica must legalize in vitro fertilization or face penalties for alleged violations of human rights protected by international law, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. In 2000, the Costa Rican Constitutional Court ruled that IVF in the country was unconstitutional because it violated the right to life of the embryo. Four years later, the Center for Reproductive Rights petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to accept a case claiming that the human rights of two Costa Rican couples were violated by the ban. Although Costa Rica initially defended the ban, the country has now proposed a bill to legalize IVF but with severe restrictions. The proposed bill limits to six the number of embryos that can be created and mandates that all created embryos be implanted. This has not made the Center for Reproductive Rights happy. The Costa Rican government has not moved forward on the bill, prompting the Commission to extend the deadline to May 31.

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/costa-rica-must-legalize-ivf-or-face-penalties-human-rights-commission>

UK - 15 Eggs Optimum for IVF Success, Study Finds

A study of more than 400,000 IVF cycles has found that doctors should aim to retrieve around 15 eggs from a woman's ovaries in a single cycle for the best chance of achieving a live birth. The study, published in the Human Reproduction journal, found a strong link between live birth rates and the number of eggs retrieved in one cycle of in-vitro fertilization (IVF). Arri Coomarasamy of Britain's Birmingham University, who led the study, said the findings suggest that aiming for around 15 eggs per cycle would maximize the chances of a live birth while minimizing the risk of over stimulating the ovaries, risking a condition known as ovarian hyper stimulation syndrome (OHSS).

<http://www.foxnews.com/health/2011/05/12/15-eggs-optimum-ivf-success-study-finds/>

Canada - Donor anonymity disappears in British Columbia

IVF sperm and egg donors can no longer be anonymous in the Canadian province of British Columbia, a judge has ruled. It was a victory for Olivia Pratten, a 29-year-old journalist, who has been campaigning for years to have access to the records of the clinic where she was conceived. She contended that it was discriminatory that adopted children could access birth records but IVF children could not.

http://www.bioedge.org/index.php/bioethics/bioethics_article/9542/

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Medical Ethics

Canada - Doctors debate transplants for foreigners

Canadian transplant surgeons are debating the ethics of transplanting the organs of foreign nationals. Some hospitals do not welcome foreign patients, but at least one hospital, Toronto General, is performing a few operations for foreign patients who provide their own organ. The issue is not whether the Canadian government should pay foreigners' medical bills. Foreign patients pay in full for their transplant. The crux of the problem is whether scarce Canadian hospital beds should be used for foreign patients and whether they should receive Canadian organs. "The tension is mainly between two arguments," contend Rebecca Bruni and Linda Wright of the University of Toronto's Joint Centre for Bioethics. "One, organs are an absolute scarcity and sharing would further disadvantage Canadians and, two, transplantation for foreign nationals aligns with Canadian values of equity and aid to the world's disadvantaged."

<http://www.bioedge.org/>

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Pedophilia

No news today

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Pornography

USA - Pornographic pictures shift men's view of women

Research done by psychologist Susan Fiske at Princeton University said changes in brain activity suggest pornographic images can shift the way men perceive women, turning them from people to interact with, to objects to act upon. In the study, the team put heterosexual men into an MRI brain scanner and showed them images of either clothed men or women, or more scantily clad men and women. The brain scans showed that when men saw the images of the women's bodies, activity increased in part of the brain called the premotor cortex, which is involved in urges to take action. The same area lights up before using power tools to do DIY. "It's as if they immediately thought to act on these bodies". In the final part of the study, Fiske asked the men to fill in a questionnaire that was used to assess how sexist they were. The brain scans showed that men who scored highest had very little activity in the prefrontal cortex and other brain regions that are involved with understanding another person's feelings and intentions. "Their reaction to the women was as if they were not fully human," Fiske said.

http://www.drjudithreisman.com/archives/2011/04/sex_objects_pic.html

UK - Anorexic women targeted by 'super-skinny' porn websites

"Beautiful girl – much prettier than all those meat mountains. Bones and ribs must be very visible. If their body mass index is above 15, they are not attractive," says a forum user commenting on a skeletal photograph. Sasha McDonald was 15 when she was first diagnosed with anorexia. "I was very lonely and felt worthless," she says. "I retreated into an online pro-anorexic community and shared everything. But McDonald was horrified when a fellow member of one pro-anorexia website emailed her requesting that she join a pornography agency. "My anorexic friend was

actually a 46-year-old male with a fetish for skinny women. He had pretended to be a young girl and persuaded me to share sexually explicit pictures and tried to convince me to join his modeling agency for the super-skinny." The forums offered advice on how to groom users of pro-anorexia websites into taking and sharing explicit photographs of themselves. The thinner the person is, the more likely they are to be contacted by a fetishist. Anorexia porn is growing in popularity and the prevalence of pro-anorexia websites is making those with eating disorders easy targets for grooming. Vulnerable users of pro-anorexia websites are increasingly being courted for their emaciated frames by pornography agencies.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/apr/06/anorexic-women-targeted-by-porn-websites>

South Africa - Naked News is OK - and that's official?

An international news program screened after the late night movie at 10pm, featuring female presenters who are nude or strip during the bulletin has caused a huge stir amongst citizens. Religious groups and rights activists have protested against the show, believing it is in contravention of broadcasting laws and a risk to children who may chance upon it." What e.TV refuses to acknowledge is the rampant sexual abuse of women and children, the 50,000 women raped annually and the fact that South Africa has the most parentless homes as a result of HIV/Aids-related deaths. Alarming, the terrible consequences of the sexual exploitation of women and children fuelled by pornography have not convinced e.TV to abandon its anti-family programming policies." Errol Naidoo of the Family Policy Institute stated that continuing support of e.TV, would strengthen their hand to continue demeaning and objectifying women and exposing children to sexually explicit images on national television.

<http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2011/05/10/naked-news-is-ok---and-that-s-official>

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Prostitution & Trafficking

South Africa - Race to save 'brothel' girls

An apparent tip-off to members of an alleged sex slave syndicate run by Nigerians and South Africans has resulted in a police raid on a farm outside Paulpietersburg in KwaZulu-Natal. It is believed that a brothel has been operating on the farm since 2006 and was used as a holding point for young girls and women trafficked into South Africa from countries in the SADC and Asia and then into Europe. "This is a massive investigation into one of the most serious cases of human trafficking we have ever come across," a spokesman said. We are following up on information that about 100 children are being held somewhere else in South Africa. The race is on to find them before they can be smuggled out of the country or before they can be hurt any further.

<http://www.pretorianews.co.za/race-to-save-brothel-girls-1.1060968>

Malaysia – Men also among human trafficking victims rescued this year

A total of 797 victims of human trafficking from 20 countries were rescued by Malaysian law enforcement authorities this year. Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Mahmood Adam said all the victims, 505 of whom were women, 223 men and 69 children had obtained an Interim Protection Order and were placed in shelter homes. He said the government had also collaborated with the Attorney-General of Australia to tackle the issue of smuggling of migrants.

<http://www.mmail.com.my/content/70615-223-men-among-human-trafficking-victims-rescued-year>

Taiwan - Human trafficking prevention praised

Taiwan is one of the few countries that deserve recognition for its efforts to eliminate cross-border human trafficking. Two researchers commissioned by the US Department of State, paid a visit to the National Immigration Agency, where they said Taiwan was listed as one of the top three countries to have effectively combated human trafficking. The other two are Colombia and Italy. The US State Department's "Trafficking in Persons" Report for last year listed Taiwan as a "tier 1" country — meaning that it fully complied with the minimum standards laid out in the US

Trafficking and Violence Protection Act. According to the report, Taiwanese authorities took various corrective measures to fight trafficking in 2009, including banning for-profit marriage brokerage firms and implementing the Human Trafficking Prevention Act. Those efforts helped Taiwan regain the top tier rating after it fell to "tier 2" in 2005 and then dropped another notch to the "tier 2 watch list" in 2006. Taiwan's efforts were enhanced with the introduction of stiffer penalties for traffickers, as well as protection and compensation for victims.

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2011/05/13/2003503125>

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Stem Cells

USA - Therapy brings new hope for Tay-Sachs disease

Tay-Sachs disease, a devastating congenital error in metabolism of central nervous system fats, is caused by a rare genetic mutation. It usually leads to death by the age of four. Marked by little or no movement or trouble swallowing around age six months, children with Tay-Sachs also exhibit frequent seizures and the loss of hearing and sight. Dr. Burton Feinerman, formerly of the Mayo Clinic, teamed up with Dr. Javier Paino, who trained at Mt. Sinai Hospital Medical School in New York, to initiate a novel gene treatment in three children with Tay-Sachs at the Concebir Clinic in Lima, Peru. After receiving neuron stem cells with a normal copy of the aberrant Tay-Sachs gene, the children displayed improvements in motor function, an increase in muscle tone, more swallowing and fewer seizures. The physicians plan to repeat the therapy again within the next three months, which comes as welcome news.

http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.2575/news_detail.asp

USA - Court lets US continue funding embryonic stem cell study

After a long, complex series of legal battles, US government funding for research on human embryonic stem cells can resume, at least for the time being. The 2-to-1 ruling, by a panel of judges from the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, blocks a lower-court decision last August holding that such research is illegal under a law banning public spending on research in which human embryos are damaged or destroyed. Two judges on the appellate court said last week that because the law is written in the present tense, "it does not extend to past actions." In her dissenting opinion, Judge Karen Henderson accused the majority of committing "linguistic jujitsu": "The majority opinion has taken a straightforward case of statutory construction and produced a result that would make Rube Goldberg tip his hat." Rube Goldberg is best known for a series of popular cartoons depicting complex gadgets that perform simple tasks in indirect, convoluted ways. Samuel B. Casey, a lawyer for two scientists who sued the government to stop funding human embryonic stem cell research, said that he was disappointed but also pleased that the Appeals Court kept his suit alive, and that he was considering an appeal.

<http://www.bioedge.org/>

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/30/health/30stemcells.html?_r=1

USA - Adult stem cells take root in liver's and repair damage

Johns Hopkins researchers have demonstrated that human liver cells derived from adult cells can be coaxed into an embryonic state and begin regenerating liver tissue in mice with chronic liver damage. The work, published in the May 11 issue of the journal *Science Translational Medicine*, suggests that liver cells derived from "induced-pluripotent stem cells could one day be used as an alternative to liver transplant in patients with serious liver diseases, bypassing long waiting lists for organs and concerns about immune system rejection of donated tissue. "Our findings provide a foundation for producing functional liver cells for patients who suffer liver diseases and are in need of transplantation," says Yoon-Young Jang, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of oncology at the Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Centre. "iPSC-derived liver cells not only can be generated in large amounts, but also can be tailored to each patient, preventing immune-rejection problems associated with liver transplants from unmatched donors or embryonic stem cells." Although the liver can regenerate in the body, end-stage liver failure caused by diseases like cirrhosis and cancers eventually destroy the liver's regenerative ability, Jang says.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110511142134.htm>

France - National Assembly set to uphold curbs on embryonic stem cells

France looks set to maintain its curbs on human embryonic stem cell research after the conservative government fought off a parliamentary bid to liberalize the country's bioethics law. The National Assembly voted to uphold the curbs in the second reading of the new bioethics law. Conservative legislators and the Roman Catholic Church had protested after an initial Senate vote to authorize this research. France has one of the stricter laws on embryonic stem cell research in Europe, banning it except for research with imported embryos not used for in vitro fertilization in other countries. Opponents of embryonic stem cell research argue it is morally wrong because it manipulates or destroys human embryos. Supporters see it as a possible avenue toward new treatments for many medical conditions. Paris Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois, head of the Catholic Church in France, urged legislators this week not to liberalize the law, saying that would amount to "a regression in civilization" and open the door to "state-sponsored eugenics."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/26/us-france-embryo-idUSTRE74P38220110526>

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Substance Abuse

USA - Synthetic marijuana outlawed in Texas

Synthetic marijuana products known as K2 or Spice have been outlawed in Texas, state health officials said. The ban became effective after officials with the Texas Department of State Health Services placed five synthetic cannabinoids under a controlled substances category, which makes it illegal to manufacture, distribute, possess and sell the substances. K2 or Spice is sometimes marketed as herbal incense at smoke shops, gas stations and the internet, and produce's effects similar to those of marijuana. Adverse effects associated with K2 and Spice use include chest pain, heart palpitations, agitation, drowsiness, hallucinations, nausea, vomiting, dizziness and confusion.

http://www.elpasotimes.com/cj_17940758?source=most_viewed

Canada - Group protests closure of supervised drug injection centre

Community activists in Vancouver's downtown have threatened "civil disobedience" to protest the impending closure of a controversial supervised injection site for drug users. First opened in 2003, Insite is North America's first legal injection site based on a harm reduction model, funded by British Columbia's Ministry of Health Services and Health Canada. Insite has functioned under a special exemption to the Federal Controlled Drug and Substances Act. Although the exemption has been renewed several times since 2006, the Federal Government has threatened to close the centre and a constitutional challenge is currently underway. While the Supreme Court of British Columbia has ruled that Insite should be continued, the Federal Government has been fighting the decision and has announced plans to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

<http://www.opposingviews.com/i/canadians-protest-closure-of-supervised-drug-injection-center>

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Surrogacy

Germany - Court rules surrogate children have no right to German passport

A German court ruled this week that a child born to a surrogate mother in India has no right to a passport even though the father is German. Surrogate motherhood is prohibited in Germany. However, under both German and Indian law, the legal father of a child born by surrogacy is the surrogate mother's husband, not the sperm donor. In this case, the biological father was a German man born in 1950. He and his wife applied in India to get the child, which was born in December, a German passport. The embassy rejected their application even though the birth certificate had recorded the German man and his wife as the parents. The parents may appeal.

http://www.bioedge.org/index.php/bioethics/bioethics_article/9511/

UK - High Court judge approves commercial surrogacy

A serving High Court judge has told the BBC that he is approving commercial surrogacy agreements made by British couples abroad. Laws in the UK are designed to try to prevent such arrangements, but Mr Justice Hedley said his paramount concern was the welfare of the child. The most recent case the judge approved was last month, involving a baby born to a surrogate in Ukraine. The judge said he was "extremely anxious" about the current situation. In Britain, the judge said, the only payment allowed to a surrogate mother was one of "reasonable expenses".
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13452330>

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