

MEDIA RELEASE

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Guidelines for conducting unethical and dangerous research should NOT be sanctioned in Australia

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has been conducting a public consultation on guidelines for performing clinical trials in xenotransplantation – a dangerous and unethical method of research. Submissions close today.

Xenotransplantation involves the transplantation of cells, tissue or organs from one species to another and carries the risk of viruses jumping across the species barrier resulting in a 'xeno-zoonotic' disease.

After a lengthy consultation process in 2004, the NHMRC recommended that no clinical trials involving animal to human transplantation should be conducted in Australia for five years as the risk of animal to human viral transmission was not well understood. The moratorium was sanctioned for good reason:

- Continuing risks to the community
- Public opinion
- Animal welfare and suffering

The NHMRC reviewed its decision in December 2009 and the ban was overturned pending release of 'guidelines' for conducting xenotransplantation. Now that these so-called guidelines have been released, clinical trials of xenotransplantation can proceed once the expected commencement date has been agreed.

Importantly, it has recently been reiterated to Humane Research Australia by medical experts that the critical concerns, which resulted in the 2004 moratorium being announced, remain unchanged.

Helen Marston, Chief Executive Officer, Humane Research Australia: *"There remains serious concerns about allowing this research to proceed. Aside from the individual patient's risk of contracting a zoonotic disease, they are putting the health of the entire community at risk. An individual has the right to expose themselves to any risks involved in scientific research but to further expose that risk to the wider community that has not given consent, is highly unethical."*

"The number of individuals that could suffer and die from a new epidemic could greatly exceed those potential lives which xenotransplantation was supposed to have saved in the first place." Ms Marston said.

Xenotransplantation research also inflicts great suffering on animals. HRA has uncovered [disturbing cases](#) including baboons rendered diabetic and set to receive pancreatic islet cells from genetically modified piglets; and a baboon known as Conan who received a renal transplant (a kidney from a transgenic pig) and was then killed due to the development of disseminated intravascular coagulation. [Widespread activation of clotting in small blood

vessels throughout the body leading to compromise of tissue blood flow and multiple organ damage.]

Humane Research Australia is calling for:

- A full public debate, making it a community decision rather than leaving it to the research community as it will be the general public that will pay the ultimate penalty of any fallout;
- The Productivity Commission to report on the full economic impact of xenotransplantation should it be allowed to proceed – including the possibility of epidemics and emergency response plans in such events ;
- A moratorium on all current pre-clinical xenotransplantation studies until further notice.

“Australia simply cannot allow research into xenotransplantation to proceed. Not only does it expose the recipient to further complications and disease, but it exposes entire communities to the risk of potential zoonotic epidemics, causes extreme and unnecessary cruelty to countless animals and holds little promise of resolving the problem of a shortage of suitable human organs and tissues. The added shame is that people – with conditions awaiting transplants may believe that xenotransplantation is an effective cure – it is not - and may only lead to more misery, disappointment and complications. ”, Ms Marston concluded.

Further information:

[HRA submission to the public consultation](#)

Media can also arrange to speak with Australia’s globally renowned and leading medical expert on zoonotic diseases, Professor Peter Collignon. Contact details available upon request.