DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG
Ausschuss für Bildung, Forschung und Technikfolgenabschätzung

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Öffentliche Anhörung

„Änderung des Stammzellgesetzes“

am Montag, den 3. März 2008

Key questions for the hearing

"Amendment to the Stem Cell Act"

to be held on 3 March 2008

(Leitfragen)

Key questions for the hearing "Amendment to the Stem Cell Act" to be held on 3 March 2008

1) What new ethical, legal or scientific aspects have emerged since 2002 that would justify amending the Stem Cell Act?

2) What is your assessment of the bills and motions at hand concerning an amendment to/retaining the qualifying date, especially with regard to the underlying intention of the Stem Cell Act?

3) What is your assessment of the qualifying date stipulated in the Stem Cell Act in terms of its compliance with the Basic Law: Does the current regulation today, as in 2002, create a constitutional balance between the various fundamental rights that merit protection (human dignity, right to life, freedom of research)? To what extent would a shift in balance occur if the qualifying date were changed?

4) Has/how has the scientific, ethical and social debate concerning stem cell research changed since the hearing of experts before the Committee for Education, Research and Technology Assessment of the German Bundestag on 9 May 2007? If applicable, what is your assessment of this change?

5) What new research findings (re-programming, iPS cells) prove that research into and using embryonic stem cells is indispensable?

6) To what extent can basic research be carried out using the embryonic stem cells that are legally permissible in Germany?

7) Can the new embryonic stem cells developed after 2002 be put to therapeutic use in humans? Can it be assumed that these embryonic stem cells will undergo epigenetic/genetic changes just like those stem cells that were developed before 2002? If so, when will this be? To what extent do the new conditions under which they were cultivated have an impact on the stability of the more recent stem cell lines? In your estimation, how many cultivated human embryonic stem cell lines were derived before 1 May 2007 under standardised conditions, free of animal cells and sera (xenobiotic-free), and are also available from producers?

8) In your view, do the more recent aims of embryonic stem cell research, for instance toxicity testing of medicines, fulfil the conditions in the Stem Cell Act as regards a lack of alternatives and the eminence of the research aim over protection of the embryo?

9) To what extent do you believe that embryonic stem cell research, especially using more recently derived stem cells, is necessary for the purposes of comparative research into alternative methods of stem cell research, for example the question of whether the characteristics of induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells correspond to those of human embryonic stem cells? What findings are of especial importance here?

10) What are, in your view, the most important findings of embryonic stem cell research that play a key role as regards the utilisation of adult stem cells for therapeutic purposes today and in the future?

11) In the context of the debate on research into and using embryonic stem cells emphasis is repeatedly given to its importance in the therapy of diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis (MS), diabetes and cardiac disease. How important is embryonic stem cell research compared to other approaches to developing therapies for treating these diseases?

12) What is your assessment of the prospects of embryonic stem cell research as well as therapeutically-oriented stem cell research overall in Germany? Please make reference to the various proposals for new regulations.

13) According to media reports, stem cell researchers in some countries, for instance the United States, Korea, the United Kingdom and Spain, now prefer to conduct their research using egg cells and embryos that are as fresh as possible. The result is, among other things, that some women are given financial incentives in return for donating their egg cells to stem cell research. What is your assessment of this development from an ethical point of view and what influence could an amendment to the qualifying date in the Stem Cell Act have?

14) What regulations apply to the utilisation of human embryonic stem cells in other European countries? How, in your assessment, do they compare to the current German regulation?