

Medically Assisted Procreation- The Contribution of the Bioethics Consultative Committee

The Embryo Protection Act, ACT XXI of 2012 was passed through Parliament on the 26th November.

The issues related to medically assisted procreations have been discussed at length by the Bioethics Consultative Committee for many years

The following is a list of the major events;

- 1992 “Reproductive Technology: Ethical and legal Considerations, Report of subcommittee, National Bioethics Committee, 1992.
The document was extensively discussed at two separate seminars held at the Department of Health
- 2000 “Ethical Considerations Relating to Human Reproductive Technology” report of the Bioethics Consultative Committee, 2000.
This document was discussed at the symposium on “Reproductive Technology”
- 2004 The Bioethics Consultative Committee started revising the document of 2000, however, this had to be interrupted in order to participate in a prolonged consultation process with a Select Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs
- 2004-5 Members of the Bioethics Consultative Committee were invited to make verbal or written submission on various aspect of Medically Assisted Procreation before the Select Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs between 2004 and 2005 which was to advice Parliament in the drafting of the legislation on Medically Assisted Procreation. Proceedings of the meetings were published in a detailed report on Medically Assisted Procreation by House of Representatives’ in 2005.
- 2005 Conference on “Bioethics and the Family” in collaboration with the Family Commission organised in April 2005. Prof Agostino was the guest speaker, who expanded on the Italian Law on Reproductive Technology.
- 2005 The BCC committee responded to questions from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Dr Tonio Borg on a number of issues related to Medically Assisted Procreation.
- 2009 Draft Bill on Embryo Protection was sent to the Bioethics Consultative Committee by Hon Dr Joseph Cassar, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, for an opinion. The Bioethics Consultative Committee discussed in depth the draft bill. The BCC agreed that IVF should be offered to heterosexual couples, no gamete donation should be accepted, counselling should be given for prospective parents and called for the setting up of an Independent Regulatory Authority. There was no consensus on the

number of eggs to be fertilized.

The draft bill with the amendments, accompanied by a detailed letter explaining the clauses on which there was no consensus, and concerns of the BCC were sent to Hon Minister John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy and Hon. Dr Cassar, Parliamentary Secretary for Health.

The draft bill with the amendments together with the concerns of the BCC were sent to Minister of Justice, Hon Dr Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, and were later discussed with the Minister during a meeting held for this purpose.

2009-10 A Parliamentary Committee was set up to discuss legislation on Assisted Procreation. The Committee was asked specially to discuss three issues, these were: the eligibility of couples to treatment, the freezing of embryos and donation of gametes. These issues were left open in the report of the Social Affairs Committee, 2005. Members of the Bioethics Consultative Committee were invited to make written submissions on these issues. The Parliamentary Committee on Medically Assisted Procreation, presented its report on October 2010.

The BCC after discussing the report issued a press release amplifying the opinion of the BCC. The BCC objected to the freezing of embryos and noted that not enough importance was given to technological developments which would allow the vitrification of oocytes.

2011 The BCC continued its trust for the vitrification of oocytes as an alternative to the freezing of embryos.

Presentation on Vitrification of Oocytes by the Chairman of BCC at a Conference on Medically Assisted Procreation.

2011 Case for the vitrification of oocytes was made at the meeting of Social Affairs Committee. The Social Affairs Committee had reconvened with the objective to evaluate vitrification of oocytes as an alternative to freezing of embryos following public objections by the lobby group, Professionals Against Embryo Freezing, PAEF
Report of Social Affairs Committee presented to Parliament.

2011 Conference on “Medically Assisted Procreation and Freezing Techniques” organised in May 2011. Guest Speakers were Dr Eleonora Porcu, Assisted Reproduction Unit attached to the School of Medicine at the University of Bologna and Dr Helen Watt, senior research fellow at the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Oxford.

2012 Issues relating to Medically Assisted Procreations discussed at a Meeting with Hon. Dr, Chris Said, Minister for Justice. The Bioethics Consultative Committee continued its discussions and representations on Medically Assisted Procreation.

- 2012 The Embryo Protection Bill was published in mid summer and was open for consultation. Submissions on the Bill were made by members of the BCC. The issues raised included the Embryo Protection Authority, and the number of embryos to be transferred to the uterus. It was noted that apart from these 2 issues, the Bill included all the principles that the BCC had submitted to the authorities in the amended draft Bill in 2009.
- 2012 The Embryo Protection Act, ACT XXI of 2012 was passed through Parliament on the 26th November