

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to the first issue of the *New Zealand Bioethics Journal* for this year. In this issue we are very pleased to be able to introduce a section entitled 'New Developments'. In this section guest commentators will review events or policy that impact upon New Zealand. 'New Developments' in the February issue will feature an annual review of Bioethics and Health Law. We are very pleased to have Professor Peter Skegg and Professor Donald Evans contributing to this inaugural section.

The three articles featured in this issue are grouped around the topic of reproductive medicine. No debate is more intense than that regarding technology affecting the beginnings of human life. The use of new technologies around conception and early pregnancy has presented parents with decisions where in the past no choice was available. Now, tests during early pregnancy can reveal information about a foetus including its sex, its genetic propensity to illness, and its health generally. Consequently it has become possible to avoid the birth of babies of an undesired sex, or who suffer from genetic disease. It has been claimed that in the future parents may even be able to choose a baby that will have specified genetic characteristics of intelligence, good looks or even athletic ability. Developments in technology continue at high speed, while societal consideration of these issues and legal, policy and professional responses have lagged too far behind.

There is currently some pressure for legislation governing artificial reproductive technology in New Zealand to ensure protection of children, parents (and other involved third parties), identification of potential harms, and to evaluate services (two Bills are currently at the Select Committee stage).

The first two articles raise questions about the limits of the use of medical technology for what could be considered to be non-therapeutic reasons. Martyn Evans explores the philosophical questions raised by using genetic modification techniques to create babies that meet desired characteristics specified by parents. J. M. Johnston examines the ethical arguments for and against sex selective abortions and asks questions about how abortions for this reason might be considered under present law in New Zealand.

'Actions for wrongful birth and wrongful life' by John Seymour is the title of the third article in this issue. In it, Professor Seymour examines two situations in which parents may sue for damages following the birth of a child. The first may be taken by parents who make a claim for medical negligence resulting in them having to bear the burden of an unwanted child. The second possibility is where parents claim that medical negligence has meant that their child has been born with disabilities that could have been predicted and avoided.

Thank you to the respondents who have commented on the case presented in the section 'In that Case' which began in the last issue. I would like to remind readers that we welcome comments on the 'case for next issue' featured on the last page of this issue. Comments should be sent to the Editor before May 15th 2001.

Lynley Anderson
Editor