

## case for next issue

### Call for Responses

The case outlined below will be the basis for the In That Case section for the next issue of the *New Zealand Bioethics Journal*. We invite interested readers to provide commentaries for possible publication. Responses should be kept to approximately 500-700 words in length. The editorial board will select the responses to be published in the February 2003

issue of the *New Zealand Bioethics Journal*. We also reserve the right to edit contributions, to avoid repetition of points for example. All editorial changes will be cleared with the authors before going to press. Contributions can be sent by email or by posting a copy to the Editor. Please include your name, address and phone number with your response.

A Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) is discussing newborn health checks with a pregnant woman and her partner. The LMC tells them that one of these checks is the Guthrie test, which is normal practice in screening for newborn metabolic disease. The LMC tells the parents that the Guthrie test involves a heel prick when baby is two to three days old and collection of several drops of blood on to some collection paper (the Guthrie card), which is then sent to the National Testing Centre to be tested. The remaining blood is normally then stored indefinitely, but the parents could opt for no storage if desired. One of the most common conditions tested for in using the Guthrie card is congenital hypothyroidism which occurs in one in every 4,500 babies in New Zealand. If not treated within the first weeks of life it leads to cretinism – severe irreversible developmental delay. Without newborn screening a diagnosis of congenital hypothyroidism may be difficult and delayed. The other conditions tested for are much rarer (except for cystic fibrosis) and are usually managed with special diets.

The parents inform the LMC that they do not believe in any blood tests for their baby and will opt not to have the procedure (they have also refused Vitamin K commonly given to a baby by injection immediately after birth to prevent newborn bleeding). They do not want anything that might be painful for their baby. The LMC is concerned about their response and has always wondered if this is one test that should be mandatory.