

Book Review

Protecting Our Future: The case for greater regulation of assisted reproductive technology

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The pace of development in the field of assisted reproductive technology (ART) has been dramatic over the past 20 years since the birth of the first baby born as a result of in vitro fertilisation in England in 1978. Now not only is it possible for a woman past menopause to conceive, but a child may be born that can literally have five people who could make a claim to be a parent of that child, that is; two parents who supplied the genetic material, two parents who will be the legal parents, and the woman who was the birth mother. These developments have outstripped our ability to consider these issues and to provide an ethical, legal, and medical framework in which to reflect upon the implications of these increasingly advanced activities. *Protecting Our Future* is a publication designed by the editors to be a discussion document to explore the need for greater regulation of assisted reproductive technology in New Zealand.

There is a broad range of material covered in *Protecting Our Future* including chapters on defining infertility and infertility treatments, legal issues, overseas attempts at regulation, Maori and Pacific Island perspectives on assisted reproductive technology, the rights and interests of the child, surrogacy, and health and psycho-social issues arising from assisted reproductive technology.

The assisted reproductive technologies timeline is a particularly helpful reference which parallels technological developments and legislation in New Zealand and overseas. This places news headlines that many of us will have heard of but are unlikely to be able to place accurately within the context of national and international events.

The sections by Nadja Tollemache on 'Existing New Zealand law that could apply to reproductive issues' and 'What other countries have done' are helpful explorations of the possible options for New Zealand in creating legislation which limits practices.

Other sections on the concerns of Maori and Pacific Island people give depth to this document and attend to and highlight the particular needs of these groups.

In the last chapters, Coney examines the risks that arise from assisted human reproduction. These risks

may be related to the short and long term physical and psycho-social health of the child that is produced as well as to the parents. Despite having a national ethics committee set up to look at the introduction of new practices in ART, Coney points out that there is no overseeing body that is monitoring and appraising the activities and quality of services of a clinic, or the long term consequences of ART. Currently any data collected is amalgamated with data from Australia making specific information difficult to obtain. In the very last chapter Coney makes an appeal for legislation governing ART activities in New Zealand to ensure protection of the child and the participants (including donors), identification of potential harms, and to evaluate services. The author also suggests that a regulatory body would be required to enact the legislation, to license and accredit services, establish a code of practice, maintain a register of donors, establish standards for counselling, provide ethical review of new techniques, collect and publish statistical information, provide information to all parties and government, and encourage research. Coney also provides a suggested structure and composition of that regulatory body. The claims and suggestions in this chapter are constructive and practical and demonstrate the need for our community to be much more proactive with regards to monitoring and legislating ART in New Zealand.

My only criticisms of *Protecting Our Future* are minor. The first arises in chapter three which looks at assisted reproductive technologies and related practices and attempts to create divisions between legal, medical, and ethical issues raised by particular practices. Those divisions appear somewhat artificial and sometimes issues identified to be either ethical, legal or medical could equally be examined under one or both of the other two categories as well. The other minor issue is that an index would assist readers who are looking for all references to a specific topic.

This document provides an excellent starting point for discussion of the issues particularly as they relate to the New Zealand situation. *Protecting Our Future* achieves its aim of being a publication that is accessible to a general audience.