



Egg Donations to Be Banned

By Kim Tae-gyu
Staff Reporter

The government is expected to ban human egg donations late this year, a move apparently motivated by the scandal involving the country's disgraced cloning scientist Hwang Woo-suk.

A four-member subcommittee of the National Bioethics Committee is set to convene early next week to work out a draft prohibiting women from providing their eggs to researchers.

“We aim to finalize our stance on egg contribution at the meeting due on Feb. 6,” said Prof. Cho Han-ik, who leads the committee, at Seoul National University.

“I think the subcommittee will come up with a draft outlawing egg donation for research purposes because a majority of committee members are against it,” Cho said.

He said it remains controversial whether or not to allow females to offer surplus eggs for research, which are originally extracted for artificial insemination.

“The subcommittee will discuss surplus eggs. After reaching a conclusion, the overall bioethics committee will approve it late February or early March. Then the government will draw up a bill based on it,” Cho said.

“We hope the government will send the bill to the Assembly for passage in May. If it gets the green light, egg donation will become illegal late this year,” he said.

Currently, females can contribute their eggs for research although trading of the eggs is prohibited. A host of civic groups and ethicists have asked to outlaw egg donations.

They argue a substantial number of women who undergo ovarian stimulation to procure eggs suffer side effects including infertility in extreme cases.

They voiced such concerns in the wake of the scandal generated by Hwang Woo-suk, who claimed fraudulently to have established tailor-made stem cells with human eggs in 2005.

The cells proved to be hoaxes and this means that Hwang failed to extract a single tailored stem cell batch after using 2,221 eggs from 119 females.

However, the envisioned ban on egg contributions raises the ire of embryologists who want to research with eggs to produce the potential-lucrative embryonic stem cells.

“Should such a law be enacted, scientists will not conduct studies on embryonic stem cells in Korea. They may be forced to leave the country,” Prof. Park Se-pill at Cheju National University said.

“Then, it would be a big loss. We need to take into accounts both national interests and ethics. But the ban on egg donation lacks balance. It's overly tilted toward ethics,” said Park, who harvested stem cells from human

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