

Local

Website posting serves to confuse stem cell debate

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MYSTERY surrounds the reannouncement of a long-standing requirement that any product created through human embryonic stem cell research must have a special label.

As federal parliament prepares to debate a contentious Private Member's Bill that would legalise therapeutic cloning, the Therapeutic Goods Administration has inexplicably restated the labelling rules on its website.

Christopher Pyne, who, as parliamentary secretary for health, is responsible for the TGA, does not know why.

On Friday, the TGA posted in the What's New section of its website an announcement that products manufactured from research using human embryonic stem cells must include written advice to consumers about their origin.

But Mr Pyne told The Australian last night the disclosure requirement had been in place for several years.

He said the TGA had offered him no specific reason for its reannouncement.

The mystery came as lobbying intensified over next month's debate of a bill that would legalise therapeutic cloning, in which scientists would create human embryos in test tubes and harvest them for stem cells to be used in research.

Critics argue the technique crosses a moral boundary, with the strongest opponents pledging not to accept treatment using medical procedures developed from cloning. Mr Pyne said the debate about therapeutic cloning was unrelated to the website posting. But he agreed the demand for labelling of products derived from embryonic stem cell research resonated with concerns of opponents of cloning.

Earlier yesterday, Jesuit priest and law professor Frank Brennan told a meeting of a dozen MPs that supporters of cloning should accept that the process created human embryos that were deserving of respect.

Father Brennan rejected the argument of a government-appointed committee, which argued that cloned embryos were different from embryos created through normal sexual reproduction because they had no "social or relational significance".

Father Brennan said embryos should be accorded the respect due to human life regardless of how they were created.

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