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Lib Senator warns on stem cell research

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A West Australian senator has written to Federal MPs

warning that medical advances from stem cell research are years away and consequences could include designer humans.

Liberal Senator Alan Eggleston, a medical doctor who entered politics in 1996, said politicians were being rushed into enacting laws before there had been enough time to fully appreciate the implications.

His warning comes ahead of next week's debate and conscience vote on private member's legislation that would allow therapeutic cloning of embryos for the purpose of creating embryonic stem cells.

Scientists hope stem cell research will eventually lead to treatments or cures for conditions ranging from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease to spinal cord injury, diabetes and arthritis.

But opponents say therapeutic cloning creates life for the purpose of destroying it.

Senator Eggleston said permitting the production of cloned human embryos and the formation of hybrid animal-human embryos could have profound implications for the human race.

"Accordingly I think it is important for members of the federal parliament to take more time to consider the consequences of this legislation," he wrote.

Senator Eggleston said the only conceivable beneficiaries of rushing this legislation would be the biotechnology industry.


He said proponents of the legislation were extremely naive to imagine a ban cloning humans would not be broken as inevitably some scientists would not be able to resist temptation.

"The ability to clone human coupled with gene selection technology opens the way to developments such as designer humans in which case Huxley's Brave New World would not longer be so far fetched," he said.

Senator Eggleston said an impression had been created that it would be a relatively simple matter to use stem cells to cure major diseases.

He said the reality was that there were very basic hurdles to be overcome with one expert saying treatments were still 75 years away.

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