



On Civil Dissent

Editor's Message



By John Loofbourow, MD

Half our colleagues aren't members of SSVMS. Why? Money is not the main reason, I think. Rather, it's the suspicion that organized medicine is insignificant, or even antithetical to their interests; the feeling that no voice is heard except that of paramedical politicians.

Yet we should treasure our diversity; listen without personal offense to one another especially when we disagree; know to a certainty that our own dissent will be heard. That the minority is heard, after all, is the most basic principle of democracy.

In our culture, when people can't, or don't, debate hot issues, they tend to default to politicians, who don't lead but follow, and therefore are often divided and easily bought and sold. Or they take to the streets, resorting to tantrums and threats of violence to affect those same frightened politicians.

Though physicians are collegial, with multiple common interests and concerns, we often act more like gangs or sects than community. The SSVMS Editorial Committee believes that engagement over substance makes us more relevant and effective; therefore, we do not avoid controversial issues.

The subject of this posit is the embryo. If a mother can abort, or discard her embryo, can she not give it away for medical purposes like stem cell research? The second act seems to be implicit in the first. The specific posit was: **An embryo, defined as 8 weeks gestation or less, has no innate rights. A pregnant woman does have the right to abort or, with consent of the genetic father, to allow the embryo she carries to be used for research or medical treatment.**

Among 133 responses, the results were: Agree, 74 percent; Disagree, 23 percent; No Opinion, 3; Commentaries, 18. Interestingly, the highest rate of agreement, 86 percent, was among retired SSVMS members. A few comments, edited for space, follow and the remainder are available by clicking on the link below.

"If the embryo is aborted it is usually treated as products of conception or medical tissue for purposes of disposal. It should not be necessary to involve the genetic father in any way that he would not have been involved for the abortion...the consent for the abortion could be changed if it does not already have the option, of allowing the woman to donate the embryonic tissues for medical research." — Sandra Hand

"...On balance, I do believe that at this early stage, the mother's rights clearly superceded those of an embryo with finite and uncertain chances of developing into a viable child/infant/human life. For each woman, of roughly 20 million eggs, only a few hundred are ever ovulated. Of the handful that are fertilized, most are aborted due to genetic or developmental problems. In the normal process of reproduction, an embryo is not sacrosanct, and yet on some level it still is..." — Robert Hepple

"...A woman is capable of making sophisticated decisions about her own body — and it is

her right. It is her choice, and that of the biological father, whether or not the embryo be used for scientific gain." — Lynette Layton

*"I agree, provided that no financial compensation be awarded to the husband and wife."
— Ray Bernal*

"I emphatically disagree. I KNOW that it is not true. I would like to refer you to the literature as we in Medicine like to do...Jeremiah Chapter 1 verse 5...('Before I formed you in the womb, I chose you; ere you were born, I set you apart.')..."— Deepak Chopra

"An embryo is living, human and a person distinct from his/her parents." — Randal Anderson

Go to <http://www.ssvms.org/articles/positembryo.asp> to read further comments by members regarding the embryo posit.

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