

TOP BIOETHICS STORIES: JANUARY—MARCH 2011 EDITION

BY APRIL PONTO, Research Assistant

1. **“Montana OKs Physician-Assisted Suicide”** by Alix Spiegel, *National Public Radio*, January 1, 2011.

Montana is in line to become the third state to permit physicians to assist terminally ill people who wish to end their lives. The Montana Supreme Court ruled Thursday that there is nothing in state law to prevent physicians from prescribing lethal drugs to mentally competent, terminally ill patients. (<http://tiny.cc/ds4no>)

Currently, Oregon and Washington are the only states that allow the highly controversial practice of physician-assisted suicide. In the case *Baxter v. Montana* the plaintiffs asked the court to establish the constitutional right for a physician to provide aid for the dying. The Montana Supreme Court ruled in January that there is no state law that would prevent doctors from prescribing medications to end the life of a patient.

2. **“Retracted Autism Study an ‘Elaborate Fraud,’ British Journal Finds”** by the CNN Wire Staff, *CNN*, January 5, 2011.

A now-retracted British study that linked autism to childhood vaccines was an “elaborate fraud” that has done long-lasting damage to public health, a leading medical publication reported Wednesday. (<http://tinyurl.com/29qrdtl>)

The major study which linked autism to childhood vaccinations has been debunked following an investigation by the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ). The investigation found that Dr. Andrew Wakefield, the study’s author, falsified his research and received money from a law firm that intended to sue the manufacturers of the vaccine.

3. **“France’s First ‘Saviour Sibling’ Stirs Ethical Debate about Biotechnology”** by Joseph Bamat, *France 24*, February 9, 2011.

France’s first so-called “saviour sibling” was born in a hospital in the Parisian suburb of Clamart in late January, doctors announced Tuesday. The baby, whose blood stem cells will help cure one of his siblings from a severe genetic blood disease, has also opened a new front in the bioethics debate in France. (<http://tinyurl.com/5vfkfphn>)

In February the first ‘savior sibling’ was born in France with the purpose of curing his older sister of a genetic blood disorder. The child, who did not have the blood disorder, was plucked from a dozen other fertilized

embryos and implanted in his mother’s womb. Upon birth, the child’s umbilical cord was used to cure his older sister of the disease. The French government has allocated 800,000 euros for the continuation and development of this practice and the child’s parents plan to replicate this procedure for their other son affected by the blood disorder.

4. **“Woman, 61, Gives Birth to Own Grandchild”** by Deborah L. Shelton, *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 2011.

Almost 39 weeks ago, Kristine Casey set out on an unusual journey to help her daughter and answer a spiritual calling. Her goal was achieved late Wednesday when she gave birth to her own grandson at age 61. Casey, possibly the oldest woman to give birth in Illinois, served as a surrogate for her daughter, Sara Connell, who had been trying for years to have a baby. (<http://tinyurl.com/4m37dep>)

Kristine Casey, 61, became the surrogate carrier for her daughter and son-in-law who were unable to have children. Though post-menopausal, Casey, was able to give birth to her grandchild through hormone supplementation.

5. **“White House Revises Bush-Era ‘Conscience Clause’”** by Michele Norris and Julie Rovner, *National Public Radio*, February 18, 2011.

Today, the Obama administration waded back into the controversy over abortion. It issued new rules related to what’s called the Conscience Clause. The rules are intended to strike a balance between the rights of doctors and nurses not to perform procedures that violate their beliefs and the rights of patients to obtain medical care. (<http://tinyurl.com/4e79ohh>)

In its final hours the Bush administration passed regulations known as the conscience clause that permit medical professionals to exercise their conscience when confronted with controversial medical issues. The Obama administration has now announced restrictions to this clause that will narrow the conditions under which medical professionals can object to certain medical practices.

6. **“Giving Life after Death Row”** by Christian Longo, *The New York Times*, March 5, 2011.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, there are more than 110,000 Americans on organ waiting lists. Around 19 of them die each day. There are more than 3,000

prisoners on death row in the United States, and just one inmate could save up to eight lives by donating a healthy heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and other transplantable tissues. (<http://tinyurl.com/6x9sho8>)

Christian Longo, an inmate on death row in Salem, Oregon, desires to donate his organs after he is executed. Currently there is no law prohibiting this, but there are no prisons which allow such practice. If permitted, Longo would be the first death row prisoner to donate his organs.

7. **“3-Parent Babies Could Be Conceived in UK Next Year”** by NewsCore, *Fox News*, March 11, 2011.

The treatment involves merging DNA from two fertilized eggs, so that malfunctioning mitochondria are replaced by healthy ones. As mitochondria contain small amounts of DNA, a child conceived that way would inherit genetic material from three parents, though 99.8 percent would be from the mother and father. (<http://tinyurl.com/6xt3md3>)

A team of scientists from Newcastle University have introduced an IVF technique that merges two fertilized eggs for the purpose of replacing faulty mitochondria. The result is a child born with the DNA of three parents (chromosomal DNA from the nuclei of the egg and sperm, and mitochondrial DNA from the donor egg). Though this procedure is currently outlawed in England, Parliament is now considering revising this law.

8. **“Joseph Maraachli: End-of-life Row Toddler Moved to US,”** *BBC News*, March 14, 2011.

Parents of a terminally ill Canadian boy have transferred him to a US Catholic hospital after an Ontario court ruled doctors could remove a breathing tube keeping him alive. (<http://tinyurl.com/4huwdjp>)

After a ruling in a Canadian court that allowed the withdraw of a breathing tube in a terminally ill infant, baby Joseph has been flown to Saint Louis to receive a tracheotomy that will prolong his life by approximately six months. His parents have requested this treatment so their child will not painfully choke to death after the removal of the breathing tube. The Canadian hospital where the infant was receiving treatment decided the tracheotomy was not medically necessary and disallowed the treatment.