

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

7.3.5 Research Using Human Fetal Tissue

Research with human fetal tissue research has led to the development of a number of important research and medical advances, such as the development of polio vaccine. Fetal tissue has also been used to study the mechanism of viral infections and to diagnose viral infections and inherited diseases, as well as to develop transplant therapies for a variety of conditions, for example, parkinsonism.

However, the use of fetal tissue for research purposes also raises a number of ethical considerations, including the degree to which a woman's decision to have an abortion might be influenced by the opportunity to donate fetal tissue. Concerns have also been raised about potential conflict of interest when there is possible financial benefit to those who are involved in the retrieval, storage, testing, preparation, and delivery of fetal tissues.

To protect the interests of pregnant women as well as the integrity of science, physicians who are involved in research that uses human fetal tissues should:

- (a) Abstain from offering money in exchange for fetal tissue.
- (b) In all instances, obtain the woman's voluntary, informed consent in keeping with ethics guidance, including when using fetal tissue from a spontaneous abortion for purposes of research or transplantation. Informed consent includes a disclosure of the nature of the research including the purpose of using fetal tissue, as well as informing the woman of a right to refuse to participate.
- (c) Ensure that when fetal tissue from an induced abortion is used for research purposes:
 - (i) the woman's decision to terminate the pregnancy is made prior to and independent of any discussion of using the fetal tissue for research purposes;
 - (ii) decisions regarding the technique used to induce abortion and the timing of the abortion in relation to the gestational age of the fetus are based on concern for the safety of the pregnant woman.
- (d) Ensure that when fetal tissue is to be used for transplantation in research or clinical care:
 - (i) the donor does not designate the recipient of the tissue;
 - (ii) both the donor and the recipient of the tissue give voluntary, informed consent.
- (e) Ensure that health care personnel involved in the termination of a pregnancy do not benefit from their participation in the termination, or from use of the fetal tissue for transplantation.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, III, IV, V