

## Pro-Life News in Brief

By Liz Townsend

### Two Australian Doctors Can Prescribe RU486

Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), the government body that regulates medical drugs and devices, announced April 12 that it has approved the applications of two doctors to prescribe RU486, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Australian pro-lifers objected to the TGA's decision, pointing to the growing evidence worldwide that RU486 has caused severe injuries and death in women who have used the two-drug abortion technique to abort their babies. "Tragically it will no doubt bring about deaths of unborn children, and it may, and I hope it doesn't, bring about the deaths of any Australian women," said Right to Life Australia spokeswoman Margaret Tighe, according to The Age.

RU486 had been banned from the country since 1996 by the order of Health Minister Tony Abbott. In February, the federal Parliament voted to remove decisions about RU486 from Abbott's control and place them under the authority of the TGA.

Use of RU486 by doctors will only be allowed on an individual basis, unless a company registers it for use in the country, The Age reported. If an Australian drug company submits an application and receives approval from the TGA to distribute RU486, it could then be prescribed to women across the country, according to the West Australian.

The Age reported that the French company that manufactures RU486 has begun discussions with two Australian drug companies to distribute the drug. In addition, three hospitals in Melbourne are currently considering submitting applications to prescribe RU486, according to The Age.

Pro-lifers insisted that their campaign against RU486 will continue. "When the first woman dies in Australia from using RU486, then I would hope we would be like America then, and we will start having some serious questions about it," Right to Life Australia's Queensland coordinator, Liz Preston, told ABC. "So I don't think abortion debate of whatever form abortion takes will ever be lost."

### Liver Transplant Saves Tiny Baby

The smallest infant to receive a liver transplant, Jacob Gibbs of Eldorado, Illinois, is now three months old and doing well. He received a new liver January 20 when he was 10 days old to correct a lethal genetic disorder, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

Jacob was diagnosed in utero with OTC deficiency, which is the absence of an enzyme in the liver that rids the body of ammonia. Left untreated, ammonia builds up in the bloodstream and the brain, resulting in coma, brain damage, and death, according to the AP. Women are usually carriers of the disorder and pass it to their sons.

After the diagnosis, Jacob's mother Keeley refused to consider abortion, but instead carried her baby to term. Jacob was born January 10 at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, and was put on the transplant list January 17. Three days later a donor was found, and the surgery was performed at St. Louis Children's Hospital, the AP reported.

Doctors had to reduce the size of the liver, which was obtained from an older child, before it could be placed

into Jacob. It still was too large, so a patch was placed over the incision, according to the AP. It took two weeks for Jacob to grow before the incision could finally be stitched closed.

Doctors are optimistic at Jacob's chances for recovery. "The liver is smart," Dr. Jeffrey Lowell, chief of pediatric transplant surgery at Children's Hospital, told the AP. "It's the only organ that regenerates."

### **Appeal Stalls Tennessee Pro-Life License Plate**

Tennessee pro-lifers will have to wait longer to receive their "Choose Life" license plates, as the American Civil Liberties Union took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. Although the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals approved the plates March 17, the court agreed to delay their distribution until the High Court considers the appeal, according to The Tennessean.

"It is disappointing to see the will of the people continually thwarted," said Brian Harris, president of Tennessee Right to Life. "We are confident, though, that this long, hard fight will result in a sweet victory for life. Ultimately Tennessee's Choose Life plates will hit the roads with proceeds supporting agencies across the state which serve women and their unborn children."

Legislation authorizing the license plates overwhelmingly passed the state House and Senate in May 2003. While pro-abortion groups began their court fight against the plates, pro-lifers collected 1,265 paid applications in six months, more than any other specialty license plate sponsoring nonprofit groups, according to a Tennessee Right to Life press release. The plates cost \$35 each year in addition to the regular registration fees.

To raise money for the court case, 7,000 pro-lifers purchased front plates with a design similar to the contested "Choose Life" plate (Tennessee requires only one official state license plate, on the rear of the vehicle). Much of the support has come from church congregations, who heard presentations from Tennessee Right to Life members about the purpose and importance of the license plate.

"Without the concern and help of thousands of pro-life Tennesseans and clergy, we could not have won the victory at the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals last March," said Chris Harsson, coordinator of the special church outreach effort. "We look forward to working hard in the days ahead to build on that success and developing stronger relationships with church leaders in every part of the state."

### **Disgraced Abortionist Can Practice after Retraining**

A British abortionist found guilty of "serious professional misconduct" by the General Medical Council (GMC) in March 2003 for severely injuring a woman during an abortion can practice medicine as long as he receives retraining, Press Association (PA) News reported.

The GMC was the focus of controversy in 2003 after it allowed Andrew Gbinigie to keep his medical license with certain restrictions, despite his misconduct. After more allegations of botched abortions came to light, the GMC conducted a new review.

It announced April 22 that while Gbinigie could still remain on the medical register, he would have to "regain and update his clinical skills" before he can practice again, according to PA News. Although he had GMC approval, Gbinigie has not been working as a doctor since 2003.

The original incident occurred while Gbinigie was aborting a 20-week-old unborn baby at his clinic in Birmingham in November 2000. He perforated the 21-year-old mother's uterus and removed her right ovary and fallopian tube, PA News reported.

Gbinigie continued to use forceps to pull tissue from her abdomen. When he noticed the tissue was a pinkish brown color, he realized he was pulling out her bowel, according to PA News.

The woman was sent by ambulance to Birmingham Women's Hospital. At a 2003 GMC hearing, prosecutor

Vivian Robinson told the council that surgeons found her abdomen "full of blood and floating on top was a 20-week-old foetus, largely intact apart from a missing arm and a missing leg," PA News reported.

The woman also lost a kidney, and doctors testified that she would not be able to have more children, according to The Sun.

The GMC said it would review Gbinigie's case in nine months to determine if he has undergone retraining.

### **Indian Doctor Jailed for Offering Sex-Selection Abortion**

For the first time since a 1994 Indian law banned the use of ultrasound to identify female unborn babies who are then aborted, a doctor and his assistant will go to jail for offering sex-selection abortions. Dr. Anil Sabhani and Kartar Singh were sentenced March 28 to two years in prison and a fine of 55,000 rupees (\$1,225) each, according to The Guardian.

Sabhani and Singh were caught on film during a 2001 sting operation conducted by government officials. Three pregnant women went to Sabhani's clinic in the northern state of Haryana and asked for an ultrasound. Sabhani told one woman she was carrying a "female fetus and it would be taken care of," The Guardian reported.

"The convicts do not deserve any leniency," the judge said at their sentencing, according to Agence France-Presse. "It is due to the illegal acts of persons like the convicts that the sex ratio is declining day by day."

India has faced a severe shortage of girls since ultrasound was introduced in the country in 1979, The Guardian reported. While the worldwide average ratio of girls to boys is about 1,050 to 1,000, the 2001 India census showed only 927 girls for every 1,000 boys, according to Agence France-Presse.

A study in the British journal The Lancet estimated that 10 million female unborn babies have been aborted in India in the last 20 years.

"In 12 years of the law being in force, this is the first time that the government has taken action," said Ranjana Kumari, an Indian activist from the Centre for Social Research, according to The Independent. "Revealing that the foetus is female results in it being aborted. That is akin to murder and the punishment should have been more severe. We hope that Tuesday's judgment will act as a deterrent for other doctors who would consider doing something like this."

### **Korean Stem Cell Hub Changes Focus**

Intended to support Hwang Woo-suk's now-debunked embryonic stem cell research, Korea's World Stem Cell Hub will now focus on gene therapy and adult stem cells, according to Korea Times.

"Our direct goal is to study a biological mechanism customized for a patient," Prof. Heo Dae-seog told the Times. "Toward that end, priorities would be put on adult stem cells or insulin-secreting cells." The hub is located inside Seoul National University (SNU) Hospital.

The hub opened with much fanfare last year, before Hwang's research purporting to show the first cloned embryonic cells that match specific patients was proved to be fraudulent.

Hwang was stripped of his professorial position at SNU and of various governmental posts and honors. Prosecutors told the Korea Times in April that they intend to indict Hwang and his colleague Kim Sun-jong for illegally obtaining human eggs for their experiments. The officials have still not decided whether to file criminal charges against Hwang and others for fabricating data used in reports published in the journal Science in 2004 and 2005.

Hwang continues to insist that he can clone human embryos, although he has admitted to falsifying some of

the research used in the Science reports, the Associated Press (AP) reported. He has appealed his dismissal from SNU, alleging that the university's panel that denounced his research was wrong.

"The disciplinary process didn't proceed in a legitimate and fair manner," Hwang said in his appeal, according to the AP, "and was proceeded based on false and distorted findings of the investigation."

However, despite Hwang's assertions, other scientific journals that published papers by Hwang and his associates are re-examining them. The international journal Stem Cells retracted a November 2004 paper co-authored by Kim Sun-jong and other Hwang colleagues. It was the journal's first retraction in its 24-year history, according to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

The journal's editors discovered that two photos, identified as showing separate embryonic stem cells developed under different conditions, were actually the same picture, the Post-Gazette reported. Other photos were also re-used with different identifications in the discredited Science papers.

### **Hospital Pays Damages for "Failed" Abortion of Twins**

A Canadian judge ordered St-Luc Hospital in Montreal to pay \$45,000 to a woman who gave birth prematurely to twins after supposedly having an abortion, CBC News reported.

Russian-born Saoudat Batoukaeva, who speaks neither English nor French, had what she thought was an abortion seven years ago. An analysis was conducted after the abortion to determine if any tissue from the unborn babies remained in the uterus. When the test showed that Batoukaeva was still pregnant, the hospital tried to contact her, according to CBC News.

However, Batoukaeva had moved to Toronto, and said she never received phone calls or a letter from the hospital explaining the test results. She also failed to return to the hospital for a follow-up appointment, CBC News reported.

At 25 weeks into the pregnancy, Batoukaeva gave birth to twins. She and her husband sued the hospital for \$90,000 in damages.

Quebec Superior Court Justice Michel Caron awarded Batoukaeva half of that, saying that the hospital should have tried harder to find her, but that Batoukaeva should have returned for her appointment.

### **Arizona Governor Vetoes Pro-Life Legislation**

Pro-abortion Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) vetoed four pro-life bills April 17 that would have required notarized parental consent, provided information about fetal pain to women considering abortion, barred state and local governments from funding abortion in health coverage, and banned the sale of human eggs for cloning research.

"It's deeply disappointing," Carolyn Gerster, M.D., vice chairman of the National Right to Life Medical Ethics Committee and delegate to the NRLC board from Arizona, told NRL News. "These are commonsense pieces of legislation. Her vetoes will do incalculable damage to the women of Arizona, particularly minors."

Napolitano's veto letters characterized the bills as an attempt by pro-lifers to "impose their own ideology on private and difficult medical decisions," according to the Arizona Republic. To pro-lifers, however, the bills were needed to protect the vulnerable.

The parental consent bill was intended to ensure that the minors' parents were actually notified about an intended abortion. Gerster told of one case in which a 16-year-old had an abortion after her 17-year-old boyfriend called the abortion clinic pretending to be her parent and providing consent.

Napolitano's vetoes will be remembered by pro-lifers in November, when the governor attempts to be re-elected. Republican frontrunner Len Munsil is one of three pro-life candidates vying for the GOP

nomination for governor.

"Whether you are pro-choice or pro-life, the vast majority of citizens believe that our tax dollars should not pay for elective abortions, and that parents should know when their minor daughters are having an abortion," Munsil wrote on his web site. "Janet Napolitano promised the abortion industry that she would protect their interests, and this may be the only campaign promise she has kept."

"This will energize the pro-life movement in Arizona," said Gerster. "We are trying so hard to maintain a pro-life majority in the House and Senate, but one woman is able to block bills that are supported by the majority of Arizonans. It will be one of the most important races in November."

### **Terri's Family Asks Massachusetts Governor To Protect Medically Vulnerable**

Responding to the treatment of Haleigh Poutre, the 12-year-old girl left in a coma after a beating allegedly at the hands of her adoptive parents, the family of Terri Schindler Schiavo has asked Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney to implement policies to protect such vulnerable people. A court had given a hospital permission to remove Haleigh's feeding tube until she unexpectedly began to show improvement.

The Schindler family has established the Terri Schindler Schiavo Foundation's Center for Health Care Ethics to call attention to cases across the country in which disabled people are threatened with removal of nutrition and hydration. In a letter to Gov. Romney, they outlined four proposals "for handling similar situations that will certainly arise in the future."

"Haleigh's shocking story demonstrates that much more needs to be done to protect the sick and disabled from harm, including harm imposed by courts," according to the letter. "Criminal proceedings build in greater protections when life and death are at stake. The common sense reforms outlined herein will help to provide the most vulnerable among us with better protection in the legal system. The Foundation respectfully requests that the Commonwealth immediately address the law to provide Haleigh Poutre and other children like her with greater protections."

The letter asks that end-of life court proceedings be opened to the public, that food and water should not be considered medical treatment or artificial life support, that the standard of evidence be increased in cases where no written directive has been made, and that special judicial panels be established to consider such cases.

Haleigh Poutre continues to recover at Franciscan Hospital for Children in Brighton, Massachusetts, according to the Boston Globe. The court order allowing the removal of her feeding tube has been stayed, but Haleigh would have suffered the same fate as Terri Schindler Schiavo if she hadn't shown signs of consciousness.

"[I]t is our hope," the family wrote, "that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the federal government, and other states will consider that the case of Haleigh Poutre provides an adequate reason to act make certain that when an innocent life hangs in the balance where there is no written directive and where there is only the necessity to provide food and water in order to sustain that life, that the same legal protections are made available as are available for criminal death penalty cases."