



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

PROPOSAL FOR A MORATORIUM ON HUMAN XENOTRANSPLANTATION TRIALS

(19th November 1999)

abstract

The opinion deals with the issue of transplantation of genetically modified animal organs into humans. The CNB considers that, particularly with regard to the rejection of the organ and to transmissible pathologies, as things stand at present, no safe scientific conclusions have been reached to eliminate doubts and concerns. In particular, it is not possible to accurately identify the risks connected to the transmissibility of transgenic infections, particularly concerning the effects of the relationship between genetic recombination and viral recombination. This being so, all the issues relating to conflicts between individual interests and the protection of public health become all the more important.

On account of this uncertain state of knowledge on this subject, the NBC considers necessary an approach based on the ethical principle of caution and precaution, and therefore, it endorses the demand for a moratorium on the experimental phase of xenotransplantation on man, as proposed by the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The NBC hopes that incentives will be provided for scientific research, due to the need to clarify every aspect connected with the clinical practice of xenotransplants and to the positive spin-offs on medical knowledge and more generally on its industrial use, which such research could produce. Lastly, the NBC emphasises the need to encourage opportunities for public debates, aimed at making knowledge on such issues more widespread and promoting ethical awareness in all those involved, in order to carry out an appraisal of the real social consensus on this question.