

This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on Critical Care Decisions in Fetal and Neonatal Medicine: Ethical issues during March to June 2005. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Dr David Ferguson

QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

Question 1

If fetus is likely to suffer serious abnormalities which would result in serious disability the parents would require full counselling to enable them to make an informed choice to terminate the pregnancy. Personally I could not override the wishes of a pregnant woman. If the family's view was different from mine I would offer a second opinion.

Question 2

When the baby has acquired severe brain damage with likely future severe disability

Question 3

Questions about the quality of life are the most important in my role as a Neonatologist since other decisions taken jointly with the parents depend on their perception of this.

Question 4

If decisions about intervention are to be made jointly with parents I believe professionals imparting information about quality of life need a much broader training to understand the concept of "quality of life", and to be sensitive to parents' understanding which might be quite different.

Question 5

Provided they understand fully the prognosis and are able to translate that into their own value system then the parents supported by the family should decide. If there is discord between father and mother then mediation should be offered to resolve differences. If that fails then the law should decide. People should use the law to challenge medical advice if that advice is unanimous and they still disagree.

Question 6

Economic consideration alone should not determine this issue.

Question 7

I don't think given our current accuracy for predicting prognosis this is possible.

Question 8

I am concerned about the use of directive guidance in this field. I believe it is more important to provide much better training to first line professionals to help

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them to provide accurate and comprehensive counselling to families on a one to one basis and to acknowledge their personal beliefs and values in interpreting concepts like "quality of life"

Question 9

I can't see that it would