

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

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Question 1:

Wherever possible, appropriate action should be taken to correct those abnormalities before birth if an effective management exists. About sustaining the life of the fetus with serious abnormalities, discussions need to be had with the parents about options for management available.

Where the woman is not mentally competent and her wishes would seriously jeopardise her life,, consent could be obtained through the courts to override her wishes.

Question 2:

It would not be appropriate to use medicine and surgery to prolong the life of a baby born before 24 completed weeks

Whether to prolong life using medicine or surgery in a baby with congenital abnormalities will depend on what the abnormalities are and if the abnormalities can be effectively managed

Life should not be prolonged using medicine or surgery where the baby has poor prospects for survival because of a genetic or other disorder. As for growth restriction, during pregnancy, this will depend on the severity.

Medicine and surgery should not be used to prolong the life of a newborn where the baby has acquired brain damage and is considered to be likely to have severe disability later in life

Question 3

1 The moral status of the fetus

Yes

2. Acting and omitting to act

Yes

3. Questions about the quality of life

Yes

The moral status of the fetus is important as we currently do not have any way of managing situations where the mother is threatening the long-term health of the fetus once born by neglecting herself eg a woman with phenylketonuria who refuses dietary restrictions during pregnancy resulting in high phenylalanine levels.

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Question 4

The questions are all appropriate and equally important. In addition, what is the role of the father in the decision making process during pregnancy where mother and father are not married?

Question 5

The doctor because of their knowledge and skills.

Everybody's views are important but where there is disagreement, then the courts should decide.

Both parents but where parents are not married, then there is a problem. In that situation, mother's views should take precedence unless mother is agreeable for father's views to be equally considered as hers.

Religious leader to provide support for parents.

Discussions between health care professionals, between the doctor and parents and between parents and other family members often helps to resolve differences in view between the parties involved. A second opinion should be sought from another health care team from a different hospital.

If the parents remain unhappy about the medical advice after a second opinion has been obtained, then perhaps they could use the law to challenge the medical advice.

Question 6

Economic consideration should not come into the equation.

Question 7

May be

Question 8

Yes

Yes

Question 9

Yes