

Wherever I cast my glance I see roller coaster debates. From divorce to the mushrooming of gentleman's clubs ... from stewardship of natural water resources to IVF fertilisation ... we have debates to suit all tastes reaching us through every possible channel, be it a traditional radio or an iPhone application. At least these may provide a more intense alienation than the usual fireworks or electoral debates in the village square! The nature of this magazine quite rightly restricts my theme to IVF fertilisation. Notwithstanding the fact that I do not hold a PhD in neonatology, I will still jut in a comment on this. I will not delve in my strong opposition of the storage of embryos. I will only say that human nature being what it is, it tends to be quite Macciavellian in the fact that the ends quite often (but not quite rightly) justify the means. Maybe having a multiple pregnancy through an IVF procedure may discourage couples to implant their 'extra' embryos which have been stored just in case. According to the draft IVF legislation currently being discussed this should not be problem. Why? Because these embryos are then offered for adoption. But if these are not adopted? I bet my bottom buck that they will share the same drain being used by other countries! Believe you me, this is what I envisage will happen. Never mind the lip services which we are being offered.

And this reminds me of the other ongoing never-ending debate on pluripotency & stem cells? We have initially been shown a picture that pluripotency can only be achieved from embryonic stem cells. However time has shown quite the contrary with multipotency or better still pluripotency being demonstrated by a wide range of sources, including

the nose, umbilical cord, deciduous teeth and so on. And later on a major milestone was the research in induced pluripotent stem cells. And interestingly, to add to all this, only last November, research published in *Nature News* has demonstrated that scientists have managed to create adult blood progenitors directly from adult skin cells, skipping the induced pluripotent 'embryonic' stage. And since pluripotency is bypassed, the risk of them forming teratomas when implanted into patients is reduced. This is also considered to be a major breakthrough since when erythrocytes are created from pluripotent embryonic stem cells these do not make the adult form of haemoglobin (but the fetal form).

Lastly I would like to revert back to the local scenario. The government merits a round of procrastinated applause (excuse my play of words) at having published the National Sexual Health Policy during the past few weeks. Although the promised €200,000 fund severely fall short of the projected €1,500,000 needed to implement such policy, it is always a step in the right direction. Yet another recent achievement by the government is that the breast screening programme is now being extended to Gozo, whilst, in Malta, a second mammography machine will be purchased to increase the screening rate.

I couldn't wind my editorial before jotting a couple of comments on the establishment of the new Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority. It has long been rumoured that the Medicines Authority had to form part of this super authority, this being formally mentioned in the last Budget (with one of the functions of the authority to be to, and I am quoting ad verbatim, 'protect public health through the

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regulation of medicinal products and pharmaceutical activities', this being exactly the Mission Statement of the Medicines Authority). However it has recently been announced that this new Authority will be formed through an amalgamation of the Malta Standards Authority, the Consumer and Competition Department and the National Laboratory. So the regulation of medicinal products and pharmaceutical activities will be separate to that of the Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority ... at least for now ...

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