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Proceedings of the human tissues conference, House of Lords, 20 October 2009: Introduction

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Abstract On 20 October 2009, scientists and politicians gathered in the House of Lord to discuss the barriers medical researchers face when attempting to access surplus human tissues. Presently, such tissues, including those surplus to requirements for diagnosis after surgery, are all too often incinerated because patients' permission has not been sought for them to be used in medical research. A similar situation arises where organs which have been donated for transplant are unsuitable for donation. As a consequence of the conference, the Human Tissues Working Party was established to enable the discussions which began so fruitfully at the conference to continue, and to allow delegates, and participants who have joined subsequently, to present a unified case in submissions to public consultations, for example.

Keywords Drug safety testing · Human tissues working party · Animal tests

Last October, more than 50 scientists and politicians gathered in the House of Lords to examine the hurdles facing scientists who require access to human tissues in order to carry out their research, and to find possible

solutions. The conference was co-sponsored by patient safety charity Safer Medicines Trust and human tissues and services providers Biopta and Asterand. Stakeholders, including scientists from academia, biotech, the pharmaceutical industry, pathology departments and of course, biobanks, spoke enthusiastically on a range of subjects. *Cell and Tissue Banking* reported on the conference on 13 December (Clotworthy 2009).

The essential role of human tissues in medical research, whether basic research or drug and medical device development and testing, was explored, as were the benefits of using human tissue-based systems over other models. The role of pathologists as patient advocates, and the essential but oft-overlooked and under-funded role of pathology departments in facilitating and participating in research received much attention. Delegates also listened with great interest to biobank presentations on the pitfalls associated with establishing a tissue bank and the institutional challenges involved in hosting one. Ethical issues, and how human tissue-based research is perceived by patients, were also examined, while Dolores Baldasare's presentation, representing the US International Institute for the Advancement of Medicine, added a valuable international dimension. Lord McColl, to whom we are grateful for hosting the event, also contributed a surgeon's perspective to the lively discussions which ensued.

We are delighted to present the Proceedings of the Conference, and would like to thank all of the speakers who were able to contribute papers. We are

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also delighted to present additional papers from attendees Professor Gerry Thomas and Professor Barbara Pierscionek, and from surgeon Mr Anup Patel, who subsequently joined the Working Party.

As a consequence of this very successful conference, the Human Tissues Working Party was formed to enable participants to continue discussion on topics of interest, and to represent the interests and opinions of all stakeholders in public consultations, such as the recent Academy of Medical Sciences consultation on the Regulation and Governance of Medical Research, and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics consultation on Human Bodies in Medical Research, the text of which submissions is available from our website. A sub-group has been formed to examine a proposal which would seek to establish whether the application of a battery of human biology-focused assays, including those using human tissues, would outperform the current system of drug safety tests which use animal models and tissues as the final screen before human trials. One group is looking at ways of educating people about, and

promoting the role of, donated tissues in medical research. Other groups within the working party have been established to focus on bureaucracy and issues associated with ethically obtaining tissues surplus to surgery, as well as post mortem or non-transplantable organs.

More information about the conference, including speakers' powerpoint presentations and recordings of both the presentations and discussions, can be found at www.safermedicines.org/humantissues/. Further information about the Working Party may also be found there. Please contact me if you are interested in participating in the Working Party or would like to read the minutes of our last meeting.

Reference

- Clotworthy M (2009) Human tissues for research purposes: a conference in the House of Lords. *Cell Tissue Bank*. doi: [10.1007/s10561-009-9167-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10561-009-9167-7)