

# TESTING CONDITIONS



**Medical research**  
Human tissues are invaluable for medical research, and we should work to make them more available, says **Lord McColl of Dulwich**

**T**he pressing need for human tissues and organs for transplant has, quite rightly, received much attention.

A related issue, and one which has received relatively little emphasis, is the vital role that tissues and organs removed during surgery, or which cannot be used for transplant, play in the research process responsible for delivering new medicines.

Before any new medicine can be tried in patients, it must undergo extensive testing. Today, much of that testing occurs outside the species of interest, in animals or in their tissues. Extrapolating results from laboratory animals to people has always been fraught with difficulty: even individual people can react very differently to the same drug.

The more detailed knowledge we acquire about the molecular basis for the workings of the human body, and the differences between species commonly used in the laboratory, the more obvious it becomes that we cannot continue to rely on animals to model humans.

This is particularly pertinent when we consider the vast array of new technologies based on human biology that are now available to test new drugs. The value of using human tissues from every organ in the body in this process is increasingly recognised, and an increased supply of tissues will be necessary to facilitate better research in the future.

There is wide agreement amongst professionals and the

public that tissue donation for research is worthwhile, but little agreement on who should be responsible for ensuring that surplus tissues which are currently incinerated are put to good use, or how to bring that about.

A decade after the organ-retention scandal at Alder Hey broke, perhaps it is time to reassess the effect that that scandal had on public trust in scientists, and how the regulations, and the understanding of those regulations, introduced in its wake, have impacted upon this area of research.

A conference has been arranged this week (Tuesday October 20, 12.30-3.30pm Committee Room G, House of Lords; followed by afternoon tea, an open Q&A and a discussion session in the Attlee Room, House of Lords until 5pm) to bring together my fellow surgeons, pathologists, patient safety representatives, regulators such as the Human Tissue Authority, and researchers from academia and industry.

Our aim is to find a way forward to ensure that medical researchers have an ethical and reliable source of materials to carry out their vital work.

The Safety of Medicines (Evaluation) Bill seeks to address the broader issue of which technologies are best placed to address the needs of regulatory safety testing today. After the thalidomide disaster, animal testing of new drugs before they could be trialled in patients was made mandatory.

This bill seeks a comparison between those tests and a battery of the newer, human biology-based tests that were simply not available at that time.

EDM 569 in support of this bill has received 211 signatures to date, indicating the significance of this issue and its broad relevance, addressing as it does the safety of products which



**The more detailed knowledge we acquire about the molecular basis for the workings of the human body, the more obvious it becomes that we cannot continue to rely on animals to model humans**

probably all of us rely on at some stage in our lives. If these newer methods are to be adopted, better access to waste human tissues will be required, and the infrastructure must be in place to support this.

I urge you to drop in on October 20 to hear some of the speakers, who have come from all over the UK and the US. ●

**Professor the Lord McColl of Dulwich is a Conservative health spokesman**