

Lack of ethical approval and omission of experimental evidence

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This editorial concerns two articles published in *Human Reproduction*: 'Restoration of ovarian function after allografting ovarian cortex between genetically non-identical sisters' (Donnez J, Squifflet J, Pirard C, Jadoul P and Dolmans MM, Hum Reprod, 25:2489–2495, 2010) and 'Livebirth after allografting of ovarian cortex between genetically non-identical sisters' (Donnez J, Squifflet J, Pirard C, Demylle D, Delbaere A, Armenio L, Englert Y, Cheron AC, Jadoul P and Dolmans MM. Hum Reprod, 26: 1384–1388, 2011).

As Editor-in-Chief, I received, in May 2011, a letter from the Vice-Rector of the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) informing the journal that both articles contained statements that could not be fully supported by experimental evidence. The articles mentioned that no ovarian follicles were present in ovarian biopsy from the patient who had a child after allografting ovarian cortex. A laboratory report on a sample of the same ovary revealed the presence of ovarian follicles: an unexpected finding that was not mentioned in either article. A second concern, regarding the appropriateness of the ethical approval granted for these studies, was also raised.

The UCL authors (Donnez, Squifflet, Pirard, Jadoul, Dolmans and Cheron) now recognize their errors and, in a letter to the Editor in this issue, agree that, firstly the finding of the presence of a number of ovarian follicles should have been mentioned and commented upon, and secondly, that in future specific and appropriate ethics committee approval will be sought and obtained. They go on to elaborate why the presence of ovarian follicles is unlikely to change the clinical

diagnosis, the indications for surgery or the cause of restoration of ovarian activity. In an accompanying Letter to the Editor, three co-authors of the second article (Englert, Delbaere and Armenio) explain their reasons for wishing to withdraw their names from the article.

As *Human Reproduction* is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the advice of the committee was sought prior to any decisions being made by the journal. As Editor, I must accept the correction of the literature by both sets of authors, but I reiterate the importance that reports must mention all findings—even if they are unexpected and do not compromise the meaning of a study. I also cannot stress highly enough the necessity to obtain appropriate ethical approval.

After much discussion and careful consideration, the journal has decided not to retract either article based on the premise that the data are sound.

References

- Donnez J, Squifflet J, Pirard C, Jadoul P, Dolmans MM. Restoration of ovarian follicles after allografting ovarian cortex between genetically non-identical sisters. Hum Reprod, **25**:2489–2495, 2010.
- Donnez J, Squifflet J, Pirard C, Demylle D, Delbaere A, Armenio L, Englert Y, Cheron AC, Jadoul P, Dolmans MM. Livebirth after allografting of ovarian cortex between genetically non-identical sisters. Hum Reprod, **26**,1384–1388, 2011.