

Pro-Lifers Speak Out Against Taxpayer-Funded Experiments Using Aborted Fetal Body Parts

by Laretta Brown

WASHINGTON — Pro-life advocates and lawmakers are calling attention to a recent study out of the University of Pittsburgh that raised questions about whether the university was taking organs from aborted babies that were delivered alive. These pro-life concerns are compounded by the reality that, under the Biden administration, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has allotted \$88 million in funding for human fetal-tissue research for fiscal year 2022. And, although unanswered questions surrounding how organs are used for this research and consent is obtained continue to crop up, the Biden administration has lifted restrictions and ethical review on these experiments.

In August, FOIA requests from Judicial Watch and the Center for Medical Progress revealed that the University of Pittsburgh in 2015 proposed to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to “develop a pipeline to the acquisition, quality control and distribution of human genitourinary [urinary and genital organs and functions] samples obtained throughout development (6-42 weeks gestation).” The university’s researchers also told NIH, “We record the warm ischemic time on our samples and take steps to keep it at a minimum to ensure the highest quality biological specimens.” Warm ischemia time is defined by NIH as “the time a tissue, organ, or body part remains at body temperature after its blood supply has been reduced or cut off but before it is cooled or reconnected to a blood supply.”

In September, more than 50 GOP federal lawmakers wrote a letter demanding a complete investigation into the University of Pittsburgh’s abortion procedures and research. They wrote that “the statements about ‘warm ischemia’ raise questions about the cause of death for these babies. ... Pitt states that it sought to minimize the time between when the blood supply to an organ was reduced and when the organ is cooled or reconnected. If the organs are harvested from a baby born after induced abortion, it is possible the baby was delivered alive and the removal of the organs was the cause of the baby’s death.”

They added, “Pitt’s application states that it can obtain access to the organs and tissues of unborn babies between 6-24 weeks gestation, but it partners with another organization to obtain unborn babies between 25-42 weeks gestation. Babies as young as less than 22-weeks gestation have been known to survive outside the womb with appropriate care.” The lawmakers also quoted the university’s statement that it “tailor[s] [its] collection processes on a case-by-case basis to maximize the needs of investigators,” noting, “It would be illegal for researchers to have any part in the decisions surrounding the obtainment of fetal tissue from elective abortions.”

David Daleiden’s Perspective

Experiments involving the removal of organs from aborted babies have been going on for decades, David Daleiden, founder of the Center for Medical Progress who released pro-life undercover videos allegedly showing trafficking in human fetal tissue by Planned Parenthood, told the Register. “Aborted babies have been experimented on at the University of Pittsburgh going back nearly 100 years,” he said, referencing the work of the university’s Dr. Davenport Hooker, who “actually filmed his experiments in the 1930s to 1950s testing the reflexes of babies aborted alive until they died — the films are available on YouTube.”

Daleiden also pointed out that a nurse, Wilhamine Dick, at Pitt’s affiliated UPMC Magee Hospital, testified in 1972 before the Pennsylvania Legislature that “she saw live aborted infants moving while being packed in ice to ship to the university for experiments.”

The Washington, D.C.-based law firm Hyman, Phelps and McNamara (HPM) concluded a review of the university’s practices in December, stating that the “university’s activities in support of research involving human fetal tissue are conducted in compliance with federal and state laws.” However, the firm stated it did not review “the clinical decision-making or delivery of medical care, such as abortion, by individuals serving in their capacity as University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) employees,” since “UPMC is a private, nonprofit corporation that operates hospitals and employs physicians, residents, and fellows,” and “Pitt has no role in managing or supervising the provision of medical services by UPMC personnel.”

This caused many, including Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Pro-Life Caucus, to view the probe as a “whitewash.” “A truly transparent and comprehensive assessment would not have evaded the questions raised by public records,” he told Fox News, “especially and including whether the University of Pittsburgh used the body parts of babies who were born alive and died from having their organs harvested, as well as if individuals procuring the baby body parts for the university altered abortion procedures to suit their gruesome research.”

“The University of Pittsburgh lawyered up and tried to call it ‘transparency,’ yet refused to examine the actual abortion and organ-harvesting practices at its affiliated clinical locations like UPMC Magee and Planned Parenthood Western Pennsylvania,” Daleiden said.

“Planned Parenthood’s abortion providers are on staff at the University of Pittsburgh and perform abortions at UPMC to obtain the fetuses for the university’s experiments,” he added. “Planned Parenthood Western Pennsylvania is a ‘contracted care site’ for the university, part of the university medical system. The so-called ‘regulatory assessment’ released by Pitt a few weeks ago in fact determined that Planned Parenthood abortion providers at UPMC routinely failed to document patient consent correctly — even to the point that some consent forms were not signed.”

Funding ‘Humanized Mice’

A recent report from White Coat Waste, a group that opposes experimentation on animals, highlighted that the NIH plans to spend \$88 million on human fetal-tissue research this year, with \$27 million already approved for ongoing research. It detailed several experiments involving the transplanting of organs from aborted babies on to mice. In one such experiment at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “mice were implanted with minced pieces of fetal bone marrow, liver and thymus to make their bodies mimic the human immune system — or, in the words of the experimenters, ‘BLT-humanized mice.’”

Another experiment involved “implanting two pieces of human fetal lung tissue (Advanced Bioscience Resources) subcutaneously into the back” of the mice. One NIAID-funded study that took place at the University of Pittsburgh involved transplanting the scalps of aborted babies onto mice.

The White Coat Waste report found that 80% of the funding going to human fetal-tissue research came from Dr. Anthony Fauci’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. David Prentice, vice president and research director at the pro-life Charlotte Lozier Institute, who has a doctorate in biochemistry, told the Register that “Dr. Fauci’s institute seems to be one of the chief abusers in terms of fetal-tissue funding from abortion. ... Fauci may be a good scientist, but as the head of this institute, he’s the responsible person that allows this funding to continue.”

Ethical Alternatives

Prentice said that such experiments are “antiquated science, using organs and tissues and sometimes whole limbs from aborted babies for studies,” when “there are better and certainly ethical techniques nowadays, for example, using adult stem cells.” He said that many of the studies involving human fetal tissue make “what are called humanized mice,” but “there are a lot of different ways to make humanized mice” that don’t involve an ethical issue, like adding “human cancer cells to a mouse and just seeing how they grow in the mouse or adding a couple of human genes, or I could add adult stem cells.”

He went on to explain that “it’s the source of the tissue that really causes all of the problems” and added that “umbilical-cord blood” or “tissue that has been taken from surgery after birth” can be used in research as ethical alternatives.

Prentice thought that millions were still being spent by NIH on this type of research because this is the way they’ve always done this, and “they think abortion is fine, so they see no problem.” He said in this area scientists “are not being creative in terms of our scientific experiments, not looking for better ways to do the experiments, more efficient ways that would help patients — instead of traffic in body parts.”

Daleiden told the Register that fetal experimentation is “primarily about the convenience of having an ‘assembly line’ supply of fresh, living human biological ‘material’ for commercial and experimental use,” and it “exploits the unequal legal status of aborted infants in order to avoid the responsibilities and liabilities of research on more protected groups of people.”

Father Tad Pacholczyk, the director of education and staff ethicist at the National Catholic Bioethics Center, told the Register that the Church “has long protested the use of human tissue obtained from direct abortions in research and instead encouraged the use of alternatives, as emphasized in several of her bioethics teaching documents. For example, the use of cells derived from a miscarriage, with parental consent, can offer a matched-tissue source to cells derived from direct abortions.”

Prentice pointed out that the Trump administration announced \$20 million in funding in December 2018 for developing “human-tissue models that closely mimic and can be used to faithfully model human embryonic development or other aspects of human biology, for example, the human immune system, that do not rely on the use of human fetal tissue obtained from elective abortions.” He said that announcement generated “a lot of excitement in the scientific community,” as “you could see people that were eager to switch away from something that was controversial, whether they agreed with abortion or not.”

NIH Reverses Review Requirement

In April, the NIH announced that because “the HHS secretary has determined there are no new ethical issues that require special review, HHS is reversing its 2019 decision that all research applications for NIH grants and contracts proposing the use of human fetal tissue from elective abortions be reviewed by an Ethics Advisory Board.”

Prentice, who was a member of that board, told the Register that they looked at 14 proposals for use of fetal tissue in experiments and only approved one, by a split vote. He pointed out that while there were proponents of fetal-tissue research on the board, “at least one-third of those denials were unanimous, which tells you that even these pro-fetal-tissue researchers, their conscience bothered them enough that they could see ethical flaws in these proposals.” He lamented that “the current administration really doesn’t want to face up to the ethics of it.”

Father Pacholczyk also served on the fetal-tissue advisory board in 2020 and said during that time he was “pleased to see the strong pro-life advice and perspective offered by that board and their almost-unanimous recommendations to decline to fund many research proposals that relied on cell lines and tissues derived from abortions.” He also praised the Trump administration’s creation of the board, saying that, “as far as I am aware, no prior administration had ever taken such intentionally pro-life steps to limit the use of fetal cells derived from direct abortions in research.”

Prentice noted the political back-and-forth that has taken place over the past several decades over funding for these experiments using human fetal tissue. “Even back in the 1980s, NIH was funding research using fetal tissue from abortions,” he said. “President Reagan actually instituted a moratorium that stopped it for a while; that continued through President H.W. Bush, and then President Clinton reinstated that funding. There was an attempt in the Trump administration to decrease and hopefully stop all of the funding. There was a decrease, but President Biden has restored that funding.”

Father Pacholczyk said that there was a “whiplash effect” under the Biden administration that is “returning us to the prior situation where fetal-tissue research faced very few practical barriers or limitations.” He emphasized that “control over funding serves as a critical mechanism to avoid unethical research practices in the research sciences. The granting of funding, especially federal funding, is one of the highest forms of approbation and blessing a researcher can obtain in terms of his or her particular line of work. Disbursement of funding needs to be directly linked to our vision of good, ethical science.”

When Daleiden first released undercover footage in 2015 of Planned Parenthood employees appearing to traffic in the body parts of aborted babies, even then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton called the footage “disturbing.” “People from all walks of life are horrified by post-heartbeat abortions and trafficking of aborted babies,” he said.

Daleiden urged public representatives to be “loud and bold about these topics and keep talking about them and demanding answers from the government, Planned Parenthood and institutions like Pitt.”

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