

# Correspondence

## ISSCR: grave omission of age limit for embryo research

We are researchers with differing views on the ethics of stem-cell and embryo research who nonetheless share deep concerns about the latest guidelines from the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR; see R. Lovell-Badge *Nature* 593, 479; 2021).

The 2016 ISSCR guidelines ruled out experiments on human embryos beyond 14 days, citing broad international consensus that these lacked “a compelling scientific rationale, raise substantial ethical concerns, and/or are illegal in many jurisdictions” (see [go.nature.com/3cqc4bw](https://go.nature.com/3cqc4bw)). The latest guidelines drop this prohibition (see [go.nature.com/3gfkkw8](https://go.nature.com/3gfkkw8)) and do not propose any alternative.

At some point, the developing human embryo reaches a stage at which it should not be used for research. There is disagreement about when that happens, but scientists need to acknowledge that it does, and reassure the public that they accept limits. The latest guidelines do not prohibit the development or research use of *ex vivo* embryos at any stage.

Defining and defending a new limit, and possible constraints within it, will be hard. This was the case for the 14-day cut-off, selected some 40 years ago. But setting no limit is a grave omission.

**Josephine Johnston** The Hastings Center, Garrison, New York, USA.  
[johnstonj@thehastingscenter.org](mailto:johnstonj@thehastingscenter.org)

**Françoise Baylis** Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada.

**Henry T. Greely** Stanford Law School, Stanford, California, USA.

## Make taxes fairer to curb inequality and boost health

A century’s research has shown that inequality in society makes everyone less healthy, including rich people. Despite this, almost nothing has been done to address the problem (see *Nature* 592, 674–680; 2021). Inequality increases every year in most nations, and affects every aspect of our lives.

Early-twentieth-century biocultural anthropologists found that average height reflects the “material and moral conditions of that society” (J. M. Tanner *Acta Paediatr. Jpn* 29, 96–103; 1987). My own research has found that more income equality predicts greater average height (and, by extension, better health) for women and men. Having more money has a small effect on height but there is no association with national gross domestic product (B. Bogin *et al. Am. J. Hum. Biol.* 29, e22980; 2017).

When I talk to politicians about the suffering that inequality creates for all citizens, especially poor people, they say it’s complicated. No, it is clear. To tackle inequality, we must encourage partnerships with groups that advocate on behalf of marginalized people. We must elect decision makers who will ensure that the super-rich pay their fair share in taxes, who will impose fairer corporate taxes and who will use the money to benefit the most deprived 20% of the population.

**Barry Bogin** Loughborough University, Barrow upon Soar, UK.  
[b.a.bogin@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:b.a.bogin@lboro.ac.uk)



Kongeeegen, the King Oak, in Denmark could be up to 2,000 years old.

## Ancient oaks of Europe are archives – protect them

Some of the oldest trees in Europe are in danger because they are not being given the necessary level of protection. Oak trees (*Quercus robur*) that are more than 1,000 years old are found in the United Kingdom and in Fennoscandia, which includes Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

For example, Denmark’s King Oak (pictured) is one of the world’s oldest living trees, dating to around 1,900 years of age. The United Kingdom has the largest collection of ancient oaks, reflecting 1,500 years of ship-building.

The trees contain rings that represent archives of historical climate fluctuations and levels of atmospheric gases, so they can help to answer pressing questions about climate change and ecosystem dynamics (P. M. Kelly *et al. Nature* 340, 57–60; 1989).

Fennoscandia and the United Kingdom could better safeguard their oaks using mechanisms such as those offered by the European Union’s Natura 2000 network of protected areas, or the protections conferred by UNESCO World Heritage sites in the United Kingdom. Otherwise, unsustainable management practices, deforestation, air pollution and climate change could leave these ancient species vulnerable to disease and extinction, with the loss of irreplaceable scientific information and cultural heritage.

**Christian Sonne**  
Aarhus University, Roskilde, Denmark.  
[cs@bios.au.dk](mailto:cs@bios.au.dk)

**Changlei Xia** Nanjing Forestry University, Nanjing, China.

**Su Shiung Lam** University Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia.