

children either for no reason at all or to attempt to produce outcomes that can in no way be predicted or guaranteed.

If we truly value an individual's freedom to determine the path of their own lives we should accept the decisions they make even if they appear to have no rational justification. The only justifiable exception to this rule is when the choices of individuals are likely to harm third parties, in which case we maybe justified in intervening to protect the interests of these third parties. If it were clear that most children brought to birth are harmed or wronged by being brought to birth then maybe the choice to have children should be discouraged and not assisted by the state. However, it is not clear if human existence is generally experienced as a harm rather than a benefit even though suffering is necessarily intrinsic to this condition. Thus, where it can be expected that the children created are likely to have worthwhile lives then, however irrational the choices to have these children are, these choices should be respected and enabled (as far as

possible) to encourage the flourishing of existing human lives which are enriched by such irrational choices as to bear children, fall in love and other "irrational" human behaviours.

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## REFERENCES

- 1 Häyry M. A rational cure for pre-reproductive stress syndrome. *J Med Ethics* 2004;**30**:377–8.
- 2 This assertion also focuses purely on the outcome in terms of the welfare of the child who may be created but since Soren Holm deals with this issue in his response to Häyry's paper I will leave this aside for now.
- 3 See, for example, Rebecca Bennett and John Harris. Are there lives not worth living? When is it morally wrong to reproduce? In: Donna Dickenson, ed. *Ethical Issues in Maternal-Fetal Medicine* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002:321–34.

## LETTER

### Response from Dundee Medical Student Council to "media misinterpretation"

We write in response to the original article by Rennie and Rudland published in the April 2003 edition of this journal.<sup>1</sup> Current and former Dundee Medical School students are concerned at the media misinterpretation of the study and the consequences that this branding of "dishonesty" will have on Dundee Medical School's reputation and also on individuals embarking on their medical careers.

This study was originally published in the *BMJ* in 2001,<sup>2</sup> the data being collected more than two years before that. In the student response to this original study, it was noted that the study had taken place at the time of

the introduction of the new curriculum and "students were being asked to produce excessive documentation. Some students did not reference source information properly—partly due to time pressures and partly due to genuine ignorance of proper codes of reference practice".<sup>3</sup> Further to that, the "scenarios" as described in the published paper, were phrased more ambiguously than the actual scenarios that were used in the questionnaires.

Dundee Medical School took the initial study very seriously. However, they embraced the information from the study in a positive way. Guidelines concerning what was considered fraud and plagiarism in terms of submission of work were established. A code of practice was also developed and this now has to be signed by all medical students on entry to Dundee.

Although much further statistical analysis has been done on this study since that original publication, it still contains all the

original raw data. The republishing of this study and the media misinterpretation of it has led to a whole new generation of Dundee students feeling that they have been marked out as "dishonest" when the Dundee Medical School curriculum has now, and for several years, fully implemented guidelines to guard against any misconduct.

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## References

- 1 Rennie SC, Rudland JR. Differences in medical students' attitudes to academic misconduct and reported behaviour across the years: a questionnaire study. *J Med Ethics* 2003;**29**:97–102.
- 2 Rennie SC, Crosby JR. Are "tomorrow's doctors" honest? Questionnaire study exploring medical students' attitudes and reported behaviour on academic misconduct. *BMJ* 2001;**322**:274–5.
- 3 [www.studentbmj.com/back\\_issues/0501/letters/160a.html](http://www.studentbmj.com/back_issues/0501/letters/160a.html) (accessed 20 June 2004).