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Questioning the Legality of Regenerative Medicines: A Bioethical Conundrum

Sriyalini V.*

Abstract

The growth of regenerative medicine (RM) has become a famous area in today's opinion. It is used and guided by patients, healthcare practitioners, and governments to reduce healthcare's growing medical and financial challenges. It started in the twentieth century when the study of regeneration and transplantation gained popularity. Innovation in RM. is an area of interest for scientists, companies, and nations aiming to solve healthcare challenges. This field is also challenged with questions regarding whether the use of specific technologies and methods should be considered within the scope of RM. While developing project-specific definitions and boundaries to frame research and analysis is common, the technical and legal nuances should also be considered. There is no 'universally agreed' definition of RM due to its diversified application and interdisciplinary nature. RM integrates expertise from disciplines such as stem cell biology, transplantation, genetics, molecular biology, and tissue engineering. Hence, the credibility of these medical procedures is so ambiguous and complex that it is essential to enact a legal framework for regulating the same with transparency and ease. In the emerging human-engineering era, there are loads of biomedical potentials and bioethical risks that need to be addressed among the medical fraternity to formulate a law governing the RM. Therefore, my research is primarily proposed to address the legal and ethical challenges as an issue of concern that must be regulated to establish checks and balances on these new developing medical sciences and in solving bioethical problems.

Keywords: Regenerative medicine, transplantation, stem cell biology, human-engineering, bioethical risks

INTRODUCTION

The growth of regenerative medicine (RM) has become a famous area in today's opinion. It is used and guided by patients, healthcare practitioners, and governments to reduce healthcare's growing medical and financial challenges. It started in the twentieth century when the study of regeneration and transplantation gained popularity. The term regenerative medicine was coined in 1999 to bring the areas of cell transplantation, tissue engineering, stem cells, and nuclear transfer under one umbrella with one unifying concept: the regeneration of living tissues and organs [1]. Scholars Daar and Greenwood stated that *"Regenerative medicine is focused on the repair, replacement or regeneration of cells, tissues or organs to restore impaired function resulting from any cause, including congenital disabilities, disease, trauma, and ageing"*. The reason why regenerative medicine needs a clear position is that it is hardly on the radar of the working-level healthcare bureaucracy, although in the USA [2], as in the UK [3], governments are now aware of its importance. Innovation in RM is an area of interest for scientists, companies, and nations aiming to solve healthcare challenges. This field is also challenged with questions regarding whether the use of

***Author for Correspondence**
Sriyalini V.
E-mail: sriyalini.v@law.christuniversity.in

Student, School of Law, Christ (Deemed to be) University, Hosur Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

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specific technologies and methods should be considered within the scope of RM. While developing project-specific definitions and boundaries to frame research and analysis is common, the technical and legal nuances should also be considered. RM. integrates expertise from disciplines such as stem cell biology, transplantation, genetics, molecular biology, and tissue engineering. Statistics of government are frail on the expenses of disease that happen past clinic therapy, and it is here that human cell-based medication has incredible potential versus long usage of molecular drugs for severe conditions. Hence, the credibility of these medical procedures is so ambiguous and complex that it is essential to enact a legal framework for regulating the same with transparency and ease. In the emerging human-engineering era, there are loads of biomedical potentials and bioethical risks that need to be addressed among the medical fraternity to formulate a law governing the RM. Therefore, my research is primarily proposed to address the legal and ethical challenges as an issue of concern that must be regulated to establish checks and balances on these new developing medical sciences. Thus, rights and health are coming into play with bioethical presumptions and formal protections urgently needing a reassessment to solve the bioethical problem.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How moral can Regenerative medicines be regarded in terms of Bioethics, especially in cases of stem cell therapies and clinical translations?
2. What are the legal concerns surrounding Regenerative medicines and their scope for development post these hurdles?
3. What can be the possible solutions and regulatory approaches to tackle ELS issues in Regenerative medicines?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is going to be purely doctrinal. I would rely on existing articles and findings of scholars on the issues concerning ethical and legal grounds of RM. This research involves the socio-legal type of study conducted on the welfare of people and public health. I will also cite a few landmark decisions taken by the Indian Courts that upheld patients' and doctors' ethical principles and rights under health law to support my statements.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Morality Behind Regenerative Medicines Under Bioethics

Hermerén [4] in his article says that most of the improvements in regenerative medication share in common that there are numerous vulnerabilities and information holes. These highlights make the assessment of long-term consequences of the accessible choices troublesome and have consequences for the moral issues raised. He presents an outline of the ethical problems brought up in regenerative medicine, utilizing as a beginning stage of stakeholders and their interests. Moral issues are presented through work by virtue of a task that spotlights a few troublesome issues, as well as a practical framework comprising of the key ideas such as current circumstances, objectives, challenges out and about toward the purposes, and methodologies for managing the difficulties. Some of the ethical issues examined incorporate wellbeing and efficiency, consent of patients, data, proficient obligations, as well as equity and reasonableness. The concept of bioethics comes into play because of the complexity and variability of products and processes used in RM which enhance the level of risk to patients, thereby leading to an increase in breadth and degree of ethical issues compared to other products [5]. There are three main features of RM products that lead to this higher level of risk:

1. They show a certain amount of variability because they contain metabolically active cells in a dynamic extracellular environment;
2. They are intended to integrate, interact, and evolve with the body to achieve regeneration of the tissue;
3. Because of this interaction, the process of regeneration is impossible to fully reverse once started–the product itself can be removed, but the influence of cells or biomolecules on surrounding tissues cannot be undone [6].

Probably the most serious problem facing the field of regenerative medicine today is the challenge of effective translation and development of viable stem cell-based therapies. Now, let us discuss these issues that emerge from innovations in the field.

Stem Cell Therapies

Stem cells (SCs) have an important role in RM research because of their unique therapeutic potential. Stem cells have two key characteristics:

1. They can self-renew (make exact copies of themselves) for long periods of time; and
2. They can differentiate (mature) into other more functional cell types [7].

Stem cells can be classified by their differentiation potential–the degree to which they are able to form different mature cell types. ES and iPS cells are pluripotent (they retain the ability to differentiate into cells of the three germ layers: ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm). Because of their ability to proliferate and form numerous cell types, there is hope ES and iPS cells can be used in cell-based therapies to cure various diseases. iPS cells in particular are of great interest as they are often considered a biologically equivalent yet more ethical alternative to ES, although this is a contested assertion [8]. Unfortunately, the characteristics that make these cells useful also make them technologically difficult to work with and potentially unsafe. There is still a need for basic research, standardization, and validation of the technology before most stem cells can be used therapeutically in RM. As such, many of the SC products and therapies currently making their way through clinical trials use adult stem cells from blood and bone marrow where safety has been better established. The public is familiar with the unresolved socio-ethical, legal, and political debates around the use of stem cells, particularly with regard to the derivation of stem cells from embryonic sources, but which now have expanded to include other cells like iPS. While the socio-ethical arguments remain unsettled in some jurisdictions [9], the science continues to progress, and legislation and professional guidelines have been developed to steer the field.

Clinical Translations

There are many international and national codes and guidelines that address the ethics of research involving human subjects. They cover issues ranging from ethics review, oversight, informed consent (at the community, family, and individual levels), subject rights, and scientific standards. In 2008, the ISSCR adopted a best practice guideline entitled Guidelines for the Clinical Translation of Stem Cells (Guidelines). The Guidelines address cell processing and manufacture, preclinical studies, and clinical research with the aim to ensure 'that basic stem cell research is responsibly translated into appropriate clinical applications for treating patients [10]'. But perhaps before considering effective strategies for translation, the first question should be whether RM technology is ready for clinical translation at all. Many commentators fear experimental RM therapies are entering the clinic without the basic scientific information needed to assess the mechanism of action, determine the risk of side effects (safety), or establish standard processes for assessing quality and functionality (efficacy). This 'hyper acceleration' of translation is not unfamiliar to biotechnology; it is often associated with conflicts of interest, and as such can have a significant impact on human subjects as well as public trust [11]. The presence of strong preclinical research is a necessity for clinical translation. Currently, in RM, there are limits to the utility of preclinical data, in part due to the relevance of animal models. This has led to an increase in the use of first-in-human (FIH) experiments in early clinical research to determine safety and efficacy, which raises a number of ethical issues. In these early-stage trials, important questions arise regarding patient recruitment (disease stage, pay-to-participate) and the use of appropriate outcome measures and controls (standard of care, sham surgeries) [12]. These aforementioned issues feed broader ones regarding the evaluation of risks and benefits, and how this impacts the informed consent process.

The Legal Concerns Surrounding Regenerative Medicines in India

While RM innovations promise to improve individual and population health, enthusiasm and investment must be balanced with a focus on resource distribution and safety. It is in determining this balance that regulations play a role, helping to direct product development and ensure safety and efficacy. Alongside governmental hopes that RM will reduce healthcare costs and stimulate economies [13], there is a concern that RM products pose challenges to existing regulatory systems. As we have discussed, RM can incorporate a combination of drugs, medical devices, and/or cell therapies. The complexity and novelty of these products make them difficult to classify for regulatory purposes and stretch the limits of our existing knowledge about how to assess their safety and efficacy. The regulatory process is only one element in a complex network of biomedical research governance that includes institutions, systems, collaborations, and economical and reputational pressures [14].

Regulatory agencies play a central role in controlling the structure, cost, and approach of the regulatory system, which in turn influence the companies and products entering the market. Regulations will change and adapt as science advances and researchers and regulators gain a better understanding of the properties of new therapies. However, it is the regulatory system and clinical trial process that ensure public safety during this time of scientific advancement. Despite its vital role, the regulatory system has faced its share of challenges in the RM field. The diversity of stakeholders makes it difficult to cultivate an ongoing dialogue with regulators, which makes policy development challenging [15]. A legitimate lack of knowledge and experience with RM products hinders the establishment of standard regulatory requirements, and regulators are required to review applications on a case-by-case basis. Consequently, since RM is a global endeavor, regulatory coherence, regulatory gaps, and implementation of ethical standards on the ground are important considerations for multinational research collaborations [16].

Comprehensive Solutions to Tackle Ethical and Legal Considerations in RM

Several jurisdictions have begun the process of updating their regulatory systems to integrate increasingly novel and complex technologies like RM, which do not fit into existing frameworks designed for pharmaceuticals and medical devices. In particular, the European Union and the United States developed new governing bodies with the relevant expertise, and regulations to establish new product categories, which are a starting place for the regulation of RM products. These regulations highlight product classification, standards for the use of cells and tissues, requirements for clinical testing, manufacturing practices, authorization for sale, and product surveillance. An analytical report issued by the Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine International Society (TERMIS) identified six comprehensive solutions commonly implemented by major countries like the EU, the US, and Canada. They are:

1. Adopt a risk-based/tiered approach to evaluate specific risks unique to each submission.
2. Identify specific pathways for therapies to reach the market quickly if they are safe and effective.
3. Promote long-term follow-up on safety, efficacy, and durability of products and outcomes.
4. Enter into agreements for parallel advice and collaborations with industrial organizations on the regulation of product development and conduct joint reviews.
5. Encourage sponsors to meet so agencies can offer specific guidance to sponsors in key technological areas of concern.
6. Accept international studies for marketing applications if they meet specific requirements for data validity, GCP, and appropriate supporting information [17].

Communication is often cited as the key to addressing the challenges regulatory bodies face in establishing clear, harmonized regulatory frameworks with standards that are responsive to the changing needs of the industry. To ensure the quality, safety and efficacy of novel products and therapies, regulators must develop an understanding of the scientific issues at hand, and rely on early

contact with the industry to address matters of product classification, scientific uncertainty, and product certification [18]. They must work with scientists to frame safety guidelines based on acceptable risk, and promote involvement and communication from standard-setting organizations, health authorities, production, and preclinical testing specialists. Unfortunately, regulatory bodies are often chronically underfunded and their capacity–including expertise, personnel, and financial resources–cannot keep pace with the demands made of them [19]. This may present a significant barrier to progress.

Ultimately, the ability of a regulatory system to recognize and manage the potential hazards of RM products is central to its success. With new technologies come new and unknown risks, and regulators are tasked with balancing these risks with benefits to patient health [20]. When assessing risk-benefit, all the complex steps moving from bench to bedside are relevant and consequently inform ethical decision-making. The establishment of sufficient trial endpoints, post-trial follow-up, and trial registries will be essential to determining long-term patient outcomes and for future evaluations of risk and benefit. While regulatory frameworks must be 'alive' to innovation, they must also be 'conservative' to ensure patient safety in a potentially high-risk area like RM [21]. Regulatory reforms are needed to make existing systems more efficient and effective.

CONCLUSION

The advancement of RM science offers the potential for cutting-edge solutions to healthcare challenges but will require concerted efforts in policy and regulations to ensure these solutions are safe and socially beneficial. Ethical, and legal issues arise from various aspects of the technology, such as the use of human cells, the clinical translation of novel and complex products, and the commercialization of publicly funded research. These areas have been explored and guidelines have been developed to aid the innovation process. However, gaps exist and questions regarding the validity of the informed consent of participants and of public awareness at all stages of research and development pervade assessments of the industry. Clear and effective regulatory regimes provide a mechanism for mitigating some of the negative consequences of RM innovation. Regulations ensure that the products that enter the market are of high quality, safe, and effective

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