

Unstable futures

Lack of funding for mental health institutions puts childrens' lives at risk

Because mental health care is in a state of crisis in Texas and the rest of the nation, jail time currently provides the best opportunity for receiving quality treatment. This in itself evinces the shocking truth that mentally ill people must become a threat to society before they are recognized as needing help and eligible for therapy through state-run correctional institutions.

Mental illnesses must be diagnosed and treated at an earlier stage. State funding of mental health programs must be given greater priority. To ignore these necessary measures is ludicrous.

According to a report issued by Human Rights Watch, the number of incarcerated mentally ill adults is three times that of those in hospital treatment. Putting these people behind bars has been labeled "the nation's default mental health treatment" by The New York Times, anything but a misnomer.

For example, almost 3,000 Tennesseans are victims of the cycle of imprisonment and treatment, according to the Chattanooga Times Free Press. The number of inmates suffering from severe mental illness has quadrupled in Colorado over the past 10 years as the space in mental institutions continues to diminish due to a lack of funding, as reported in The Denver Post. The 3,400 mentally ill prisoners in the Los Angeles County jail make it the largest de facto psychiatric inpatient facility in the country, according to The Times.

While the recent case of Rebekah Amaya, who is accused of drowning her two children and then attempting suicide, has spotlighted issues of mental health and criminality, one cannot ignore the possibility that increased state spending to develop and make available more effective psychological treatment at an earlier stage of mental illness may have prevented such a crime from taking place.

Texas Monthly recently reported the story of Grant Williams, a teenage boy undergoing treatment at Corsicana Residential Treatment Center, who hears a voice in his head that has led him to steal, punch a county-jail guard and start a fire with baseball

jerseys he stole from a concession stand. The voice continues to terrify him with threats of a 50-headed snake coming to get him and the suggestion that he "end it all."

Though it may not appear this way, Williams is lucky. He is one of the relatively few teenagers in Texas who, because of his arrest, has access to an institution that can offer professional, intense treatment every day.

In a state with a dangerously insufficient mental health system, some parents of mentally ill children turned criminally deviant have begun filing charges against their own children in hopes that they will be sentenced to Texas Youth Commission's treatment facility at Corsicana, according to Texas Monthly. Others have even relinquished custody of their children to Texas' Department of Child Protective Services because the agency is required by law to supply mental health care.

This desperation evidences a frightening situation: Other than these extreme options for acute cases, only one 81-bed residential treatment center in Waco can accommodate mentally ill children needing inpatient treatment.

Furthermore, mentally unstable juvenile delinquents can be rehabilitated if treated soon enough — otherwise, they grow into adult criminals who are even more psychotic and dangerous after additional years of mental deterioration.

Psychiatrist James Boynton of the Corsicana facility sums up the problem when he says that institution is mentally ill children's "last good chance to get better. The tragedy is that for so many of

these kids, this is also their first chance to get better too."

Correctional institutions such as Corsicana Residential Treatment Center offer therapy and accommodations equaled only by expensive private hospitals with long waiting lists. For mentally ill adults as well as children, it is only after being arrested and convicted of a crime that they gain access to a chance at recovery.

State budgets neglect to provide adequate funding for the mentally ill, leaving many to deteriorate to the point of criminality. Ironically, it is only by committing crimes that many of



LINDSAY ORMAN

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PAUL WILSON • THE BATTALION

these people are able to gain access to the treatments that may have prevented them from turning criminal in the first place.

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.

Banning human cloning stifles possible breakthroughs

The United Nations voted last week to delay further consideration of a ban on human cloning. This was a setback for the Bush administration, which had been campaigning hard to ban all forms of the still-experimental practice.

There are two main types of human cloning: reproductive and therapeutic. Reproductive cloning is the process by which a person makes infant clones of himself. Therapeutic cloning involves the use of cloned embryos by scientists to gain stem cells — cells they can use to search for cures for a wide range of diseases. The U.S. position would have forbidden both kinds, despite the potential benefit of therapeutic cloning.

The U.N. General Assembly wisely ignored the American campaign and did well in delaying the ban. This is no time to stop promising medical research just to advocate strict moral rules that are far from universally accepted.

Though the member states of the United Nations unanimously opposed reproductive cloning, they were divided on the issue of therapeutic cloning. Scientists support this type of

cloning since they can use it to produce human embryos from which they can collect stem cells. These they can make into any kind of cell in the body, raising the possibility of "growing" replacement organs for sick people. However, the Roman Catholic Church and anti-abortion groups feel that stem cell research is immoral because it starts with the destruction of a human embryo to recover the cells.

Make no mistake: Trying to produce a cloned infant through reproductive cloning is indeed unethical. With the current procedure, it is likely that such a cloned baby would suffer from severe birth defects. Plus, the process is very inefficient. cc, the cloned cat born in February 2002 and residing at Texas A&M, was the only survivor of 87 embryos created.

Therapeutic cloning is a different case altogether due to its potential for helping suffering people. Take, for example, Judson Somerville, a 40-year-old Texas man who injured his spinal cord in a cycling accident and is now paralyzed from his chest down. In the therapeutic cloning procedure, researchers would take a regular cell from Somerville's body, place it in a human egg, and allow this cloned cell to grow for about four days. Scientists would then harvest the embryonic stem cells

from the cloned egg and direct these stem cells to grow into nerve cells. These could then be used to repair Somerville's damaged spinal cord, possibly helping him move again. Since the nerve cells are derived from Somerville himself, his body will accept them readily, avoiding the problem of immune rejection that plagues organ transplants today.

Nevertheless, President George W. Bush declared that "the use of embryos to clone is wrong. We should not as a society grow life to destroy it." In saying that, Bush and other therapeutic cloning opponents confuse human life with cellular life. They mistakenly claim that a microscopic ball of cells in a Petri dish is as morally significant as Judson Somerville. They want to confer full moral standing to cells that, unlike Judson Somerville, have no thoughts, no emotions, no hopes and no sensation.

Furthermore, even if the cloned egg is accorded the same moral standing as a full-grown human, therapeutic cloning should still occur. When the president sent American troops to Iraq, he knew that some soldiers would die, but by ordering them there he did not commit murder. Rather, when a few soldiers did die, the president said they had sacrificed their lives to protect the safety and free-

dom of the American people.

Therapeutic cloning must be viewed in the same way. A cloned embryo will not be destroyed, but, rather, sacrificed to yield stem cells that will alleviate the suffering of millions of Americans.

A report issued by the National Academy of Sciences concluded that stem-cell-based therapies could help the 58 million Americans who suffer with cardiovascular diseases, the 30 million who have autoimmune diseases, the 16 million who endure diabetes, the 5.5 million who slowly lose their minds to Alzheimer's — the list is endless. Just like vaccines and antibiotics defeated many of the diseases that killed young people in the last century, stem cell therapies may conquer many old age diseases in the 21st century.

To stifle that possibility is immoral and ignorant. It seems in the case of the human organism, one should throw out the cloned organism, but keep the research bathwater that might one day comfort and cure millions of suffering patients.

Midhat Farooqi is a senior genetics major.



MIDHAT FAROOQI

MAIL CALL

Having sex not always an option for women

In response to a Nov. 10 mail call:

Mr. Auter dismissed the case for women's reproductive rights by saying that women lose their choice the moment they have sex. This is not only a sexist statement, but it is also incorrect. Also, Mr. Auter failed to address an even more ghastly issue — rape.

Does the victim of a rape lose her reproductive rights, too, then "at the point of conception"? Should a woman be forced to carry a child of a rapist, give up almost a year of her life and her normal standard of life for a crime she didn't commit? To bring a child into the world is a choice that a woman must retain at all times, especially when she didn't have a choice about its conception.

What about the father? He too chose to have sex, but loses no rights if the woman then becomes pregnant. The bias of nature is balanced by the rights of women. Women, in the case of child-bearing and birth, have more say because it's in their body, and their lives are affected. It's the women who

give up caffeine and alcohol to carry the fetus, who buy the larger clothes to accommodate it and who take maternity leave from their jobs to care for it if it is carried to term.

Meredith M. Clancy
Class of 2007

Students should let go of Bonfire dreams

In response to a Nov. 10 mail call:

With all due respect to a former Corps commander and fellow Aggie, there is nothing humble and professional about an organization that is disobeying a direct request from the University president. It represents more ego and arrogance than humility. Give it up; let it go. People died and the University stands to lose millions of dollars because of lawsuits resulting from the same type of "leadership" that was in place when the disaster occurred.

Swede Hanson
Class of 1999

Men and women must be responsible

In response to a Nov. 11 mail call:

It must be conceded that there are many immature and backwards young men in our "conservative community" who give decent men a bad name. Unfortunately, while in college, those men are an active minority. However, many grow up and join the quiet and decent majority of family men in our community.

The problem is, too many men and women do not take personal responsibility upon themselves. Men should possess personal dignity and respect for women's their rights. They should also respect themselves enough not to carouse with loose women who may one day be in a position to think about getting an abortion.

Women should take it upon themselves to behave honorably and should respect themselves enough not to go along with what the vulgar minority of men want from them. Moreover, women should respect themselves enough to expect men to be polite, decent, courteous and

respectful and have no tolerance for those who are not.

As for the rights of those affected by abortion, women's rights are only secondary to the life they carry. Most important is the right of life for the unborn child, which is entrusted by proxy to the mother and father. The father's rights are tertiary.

Dalton Vann,
Class of 2002

Abortions try to make women like men

Ms. Henderson, you said that you will not "stand to be blamed or feel ashamed for being a woman in this country." Early feminists opposing abortion were proud to be women, but recognized their differences from men. Modern feminists believe that, since men cannot have babies, women should be able to terminate their pregnancy (to become more like men).

You deserve better than a society that does not respect women and demands that they become more like men to obtain respect. You deserve a society that upholds the dignity of sin-

gle pregnant women, provides good low-cost prenatal care, good maternity benefits and better adoption laws.

You said that men are causing women to need abortions as well as stripping women of their right to have an abortion. The men who are stalking, abusing, molesting and raping women are typically not the men who oppose abortion. The men who are doing these things depend on abortion to "clean up" the situations that they create. I am certainly not perfect, but I do try to uphold the dignity and respect that women deserve.

Patrick Williams
Class of 2002

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