MRC website information on trachea transplants using stem cells

In December 2017 you kindly provided me with a copy of your letter to Professor Patricia Murray and Dr Raphael Levy, responding to points that they raised in written evidence to the Science and Technology Committee’s inquiry into research integrity.

In particular, your letter responded to their concerns that inaccurate information appears in various places on the MRC website in relation to trachea transplants using stem cells, which they argued represents a health risk. I have recently received a letter from Peter Wilmshurst (enclosed) which raises the same issue.

Your response to Professor Murray and Dr Levy in 2017 was that:

all these [articles and documents] were considered accurate at the time they were written based on the available evidence and information. Even where possible, the MRC does not retrospectively amend historic documents, but we accept that these might have been written differently in the light of what we know today.

You also argued that the MRC makes clear on its website that “it is not a healthcare provider, nor a source of medical information”, and therefore there was no need to alert readers to the more recent controversies in this area.

In July 2018 my Committee was faced with essentially the same issue. Our predecessor Committee had referred favourably to stem-cell supported trachea transplants in a Report on Regenerative Medicine in 2017, but through our research integrity inquiry we were now aware that work in this area is based on exaggerated patient outcomes.

The Committee is not able to alter the historic record or amend its predecessor’s work, and like the MRC, its Reports should not be used to inform individual patient decisions without medical advice. Nevertheless, the Committee chose to insert a short note in the margin of the 2017 Report online to refer the reader to further information on this subject in its research integrity inquiry (see paras 95–96 of our 2018 Report). This was a procedural innovation for the House, but one that we felt was important given the nature of the inquiry.
In the light of our work here I hope that you will revisit your decision not to direct readers of the relevant articles on this subject on your website to the latest information when visiting these pages. I appreciate the argument that it is important to preserve the historical record, but I hope that with a little more effort a way can be found to devise an appropriate solution, as the Committee itself has done.

I am copying this letter to Sir Mark Walport as CEO of UKRI for his reference, and to Dr Sarah Wollaston as Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, who also received Peter Wilmshurst's letter.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair, Science & Technology Committee

CC: Sir Mark Walport, CEO, UKRI
Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Peter Wilmshurst