

## An Exstream Case of Ethics



As a supplement to their citizenship studies and as part of the Ethics Education workshop at the SEB Annual Main Meeting, post-16 students from two Southampton schools were the latest (and final) group of students to experience the Extreme Theatre Company's touring workshop- "**A Present for Anna**", funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Featuring a combination of performance and hotseating (in which the students interrogate characters), the thought-provoking "A Present for Anna" centres on the ethical dilemmas surrounding the case of Anna, a fictional character suffering from Fanconi Anaemia (a potentially life threatening inherited disease), who desperately needs a bone marrow transplant. Neither parent is a suitable match. Anna's best chance is for her parents to have another child. Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) legislation, regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), allows embryos to be screened for the presence of Fanconi Anaemia. Should the legislation be extended so that embryos could also be screened for a tissue match? Would this be ethical?

The majority of the morning was devoted to an interactive performance with the student audience acting as a public consultation panel, debating the issues and implications of this potential change in legislation. With the exception of Anna, the actors (graduates from Exeter University) then came out of character to facilitate group discussions of several case studies, which touched on additional issues such as human cloning and the selection of embryos for physical characteristics, and served to put Anna's circumstances in the broader context of genetic screening.

After much consideration and lively discussion, the student consultation panel on this occasion voted strongly **against** a change in the law that would allow selection for a tissue match for the treatment of a sibling as well as the absence of Fanconi Anaemia. The students also saw the reaction of the family and doctors on being told of their decision.

A Present for Anna, for post-16 students, was developed at the University of Exeter by John Somers (Artistic Director), with the help of John Bryant and Steve Hughes of the School of Biological Sciences. For further information contact Carly Mays, Project Director, Exstream Theatre Company, Tel: 07974 956074; email: [exstream@ex.ac.uk](mailto:exstream@ex.ac.uk)

Anna may not exist, but the ethical issues explored by the students in this interactive drama are very real, as the recent High Court appeal of the Hashmi family (see <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/genome/geneticsandsociety/hg15n006.html>) illustrates.

In future, scientists and bioscience graduates may increasingly be called upon to enter into the debate over issues raised by scientific 'advances' and molecular technology, in particular. At the university level, subject benchmark statements already require that students "*should be aware of and be able to discuss ethical issues within their discipline area*" (QAA, 2002. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/phase2consult.htm>).

In the afternoon, the ethical debate continued when students joined delegates, posing questions to an invited panel of experts for a Bioethics debate on topics including genetically modified organisms, the use of animals in medical and biological research, and gene patenting.

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