

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Public discussion on collection of human tissue

Tasmanians are being asked their opinions on the collection and use of human tissue for medical research.

A University of Tasmania symposium is aiming to encourage public debate about the management of a biobank in the State.

The symposium is held from 2 until 5pm today (February 17) at the Law School, Sandy Bay campus.

A biobank is a collection of human tissue and genetic data derived from that material, such as umbilical cords. The Menzies Research Institute hopes to establish the first such biobank in Tasmania as the genetic data is key to the institute's research into complex human diseases.

The Centre for Law and Genetics is working with the Menzies in the development and governance of the biobank to ensure that world's best practice is achieved in terms of the ethical, legal and social implications of the project.

Menzies director Professor Simon Foote said having such a collection would allow researchers to link environmental, genealogical and pathological information.

"This gives us leverage to understand the pathological and biological causes of disease in Tasmania," he said.

This includes such diseases as diabetes, MS, osteoporosis and Alzheimer's.

Dean of Law Professor Don Chalmers said biobanks were being set up around the world and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) was preparing guidelines.

There are currently some draft OECD guidelines and CLG is working to ensure this biobank meets them.

"The CLG has the expertise to study ethical, legal and social issues around biobanks and the proper protections for the community," he said.

“Importantly the public must be consulted and their opinions carefully respected and addressed.”

The key note address is by Professor Timothy Caulfield, who is research director of the Health Law Institute at the University of Alberta.

Professor Simon Foote and Professor Don Chalmers will be available for media comment from 3.15pm.

Information Released by:

Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: (03) 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au