

HORIZON
HOBISOP

Cloning the First Human

Venturing into the final taboo of cloning

Drs Panos Zavos and Severino Antinori claim they are ready to embark on the greatest human experiment of our age. They say they will soon attempt to clone a human being. *Horizon* examines the possibly catastrophic consequences of such an experiment

Most people think the objections to human cloning are ethical – it would create many moral dilemmas. But there is another question that few ever ask: is science actually ready for cloning healthy humans? Many scientists believe that Zavos and Antinori's plans are profoundly reckless, and *Horizon* reveals cutting edge research which suggests their attempts to clone the first human are likely to end in tragedy.

Ever since Dolly the sheep, scientists have been continuing to experiment with cloning animals. But, as Dolly's creator, Professor Ian Wilmut, reveals, beneath the veneer of success lies a disturbing reality. Most cloning attempts on animals so far have resulted in failed implantation or abnormal foetuses. Of the animals born alive, many soon die of catastrophic organ failure. Others appear to be healthy for weeks or even months, then die suddenly, sometimes from bizarre new illnesses which do not occur in nature.

Years of painstaking work is revealing that the process of cloning itself can cause subtle – but often fatal – errors in the way genes function. There's no reason to think cloned human babies would fare any better. They may suffer from terrible illnesses that modern medicine would be powerless to prevent or cure.

Dr Zavos claims that these problems are the result of the unsophisticated methods being used by animal researchers. Using advanced IVF techniques, he is aiming to make human cloning safer than natural reproduction. But now it seems that some of these IVF procedures are being investigated for possible harmful effects on the long term health of children. Professor Gerald Schatten of the University of Pittsburgh reveals startling new evidence of these risks, which could be magnified in cloning.

The would-be human cloners are determined to clone a human baby. If they proceed however, they may be courting tragedy.

Producer/director
Jacqueline Smith

Executive Editor
John Lynch

Documentary

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