



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

25 February 1982

Thank you for your letter of 10 February about issues of medical ethics.

Recent medical developments do have far reaching implications and the Government has already sought the views of the British Medical Association, the Medical Research Council, the General Medical Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists on the specific question of in vitro fertilisation.

Because these issues are of more general public concern, I have already indicated, in my reply to Mr. Leo Abse on 10 February, that the Government will consider whether a wider examination is required. Both the scope and the form of such an examination need careful thought and we are considering these questions urgently.

(SGD) MARGARET THATCHER

The Rt. Hon. Shirley Williams, M.P.



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

12 February 1982

Dear David

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Mrs Shirley Williams, MP, arising out of the current debate about in vitro pregnancies.

As we mentioned to your Parliamentary branch today, the Prime Minister's initial view is that some form of independent inquiry into these ethical issues will be necessary, in view of the growing evidence of public concern.

I should be grateful if you could arrange for the Prime Minister to have your Secretary of State's advice on this point, and if you could also let us have a draft reply for her to send to Mrs Williams. If matters are likely to be long-drawn out, a holding reply will be necessary, but it seems to us that Ministers will need to reach a firm view quite quickly given the round of publicity.

Yours ever

Mike Paterson

D.J. Clark, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security.

11 February 1982

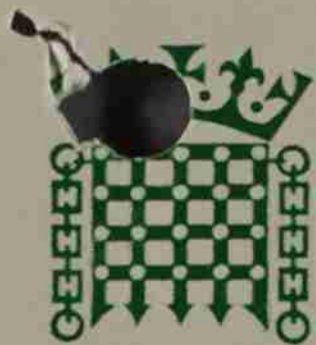
I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 10 February.

I shall of course place this before the Prime Minister and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

MAP

The Rt. Hon. Shirley Williams, MP.

From: Rt Hon Shirley Williams MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

10 February 1982

Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
SW1

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Dear Prime Minister,

I would like to support the arguments that are being put to you for a commission on medical ethics,

The recent developments in embryology, genetic engineering and replacement surgery engender a whole series of critical questions to be resolved in the field of medical ethics and law. The nature of the family, of inheritance and even of individual identity are not least among these questions.

In 1972, I was privileged to be a member of a working party sponsored by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, chaired by Walter Bodmer, now Professor of Genetics at the University of Oxford. The working group produced a study which was published under the title of 'Our Future Inheritance: Choice or Chance' published in 1974 by Oxford University Press, which explored the ethical issues arising even at that early stage from the advances of the biological sciences and of medical technology.

I believe that legitimate public concern would justify a Royal Commission on this range of issues. The lack of guidelines, indeed even of clear legal definitions, is disturbing to the public and the professions alike. A commission would enable those with varying knowledge and experience to contribute to a significant assessment of the issues and to make recommendations for the future - and its members should be drawn not only from scientists and the medical profession, but also from those with understanding of the law, theology and education. The commission would need to consider how far our traditional values and codes of behaviour remain relevant in the face of these new scientific and technological developments.

I hope you will give the proposal your careful consideration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Shy Williams'.

SHIRLEY WILLIAMS