

South Korean cloners indicted

Hwang charged with fraud, embezzlement and violation of bioethics law.

David Cyranoski

Once-feted cloning researcher Woo-Suk Hwang was indicted today, 12 May, on three charges.

The Seoul Central District prosecutor's office in South Korea charged him with embezzling KRW2.8 billion (US\$3 million) and using the funds to purchase a car for himself and gifts for politicians. He is said to have committed fraud by knowingly using fabricated data to apply for research funds.

Hwang was also charged with violating a bioethics law that outlaws the purchase of eggs for research. The law, established in January 2005, was developed partly as a response to concerns triggered by Hwang's research in the first place. Hwang had repeatedly touted the law as being crucial to creating a social consensus in the controversial field of therapeutic cloning, and offered to put his own research on hold until the law was in place. He later went back on this promise.

Five other researchers on Hwang's team were also charged with various offences, including one who, the indictment said, had deceived Hwang by claiming cells he gave Hwang were clones.

Hwang's lawyer says they are deciding on a statement. Hwang was reportedly surprised by the indictment. The cases could now proceed to trial.

Meanwhile a Buddhist organization claimed this week to have raised KRW60 billion (US\$64 million) to support Hwang's research efforts.

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Woo-Suk Hwang was celebrated for his stem cell research when it made waves in 2004.

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