

Foreword

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to write a foreword to this publication on behalf of Danish paraplegics and tetraplegics. Members from our two Danish organizations fostered the idea and took the first initiative to arrange the International Symposium on Neural Transplantation to Spinal Cord Injuries, from which the contents of this special issue have originated. But why did Danish para- and tetraplegics take this initiative? Why did we not just leave it to the scientists? The reason is not that this could not have taken place without our interference. Of course it could – and we know that very well. The initiative is, however, a logical consequence of our fundamental commandment of equality, which says:

'The place for disabled people is everywhere'

This is the basic claim as well as the aim itself for the handicap-movement. This is what integration means. The place for disabled people is not in a corner, nor is it in special reserves, but everywhere. It was natural to take the initiative.

This was the ideological answer to the question, but there is also an answer founded on another principle, perhaps the answer that most of our members would give. As their spokesman, I had therefore better give it to you. Just as it is often quoted that *war is too serious a matter to be left to generals*, we can say that this symposium deals with our lives, and we do not like to leave our lives entirely in the hands of other people – not even people we otherwise trust.

It is not our goal to try to control your research. That is far beyond our abilities and intentions. What we can do – and feel free to do – is, however, to express our opinions and state our wishes. We want to be heard. We have a voice of our own. When priority has to be given to one line of biomedical research in preference to another, it is of the utmost importance that both the scientists and other decision-makers know what we want – in particular when the issue is our lives as more or less disabled people.

As a minority group we are not well known. Even the best scientists and politicians may lack imagination and, therefore, might not understand what it means to live the life of a para- or tetraplegic. Wrong conclusions about the quality of the lives of disabled persons may arise. We want to prevent this and instead spread the message that to us it seems profitable to give the highest

priority to research in neural transplantation to spinal cord injuries.

Spinal cord injuries most often affect young people, who then face a long life confined to a wheelchair. We need a scientific breakthrough to change this prognosis, and this is exactly what we hope that work derived from a scientific symposium like this will lead to. There are two very sound reasons for giving high priority to neural transplantation research. One is the humanitarian argument. If you can save somebody from spending a lifetime in a wheelchair, or if you can limit the handicap, this should of course be done. The other argument is the cost benefit argument. It is a very good investment for society to prevent, diminish, or cure severe disabilities. When the obvious ethical, right thing of benefit to the individual coincides with the best economic result for society, how can one draw any other conclusion than to go ahead with scientific research on neural transplantation – full speed ahead! We wish you the best of luck with all your research and future co-operation in this field of science.

In relation to the possible future, therapeutic use of neural transplants, I would like to mention the donor problem. In recent years, organ and tissue transplantation have given rise to heated debates. Questions from these debates are also raised, when it comes to the possible use of human fetal nerve cells for scientific or therapeutic purposes. In our opinion such use of human tissue requires the full, informed consent of the woman from whom the donor tissue is obtained and it must not influence why, how and when a given pregnancy is terminated. I believe that it is best for the public as well as for science that all information concerning these matters is readily given to the public and without restrictions. In democratic societies it is essential that we have a well-informed public. Information and knowledge is the only effective vaccine known against prejudice and populist propaganda. The voice of the public should always be heard, but it is by far to be preferred that debates are based on facts and not fiction.

With regard to neural transplantation for therapeutic use, after the establishment of a sound scientific basis, the present and future members of our organizations will no doubt be in favour of transplantation. Just as we are very eager to support your research in spinal cord injuries and recommend that it is given the highest priority, we are eagerly waiting for the results on trans-

plantation of nerve cells. We are the most whole-hearted supporters you can get.

The proceedings and results of the symposium will be published both as the present scientific work and as a more popular report. The popular edition, initially to be published in Danish, is a token of our wish both to enlighten the public and to keep our members as well informed as possible. We do not want to raise false hopes among our members, but to give a realistic picture

of the biomedical research in relation to our spinal cord injuries as it is today.

Finally, let me express a wish: 'Vivat, crescat, floreat'. May your research live, grow, and flourish.

H. KALLEHAUGE
High Court Judge
President of PTU

The Danish Society of Polio and Accident Victims