

NUFFIELD COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo 00.01 GMT

Who wants to live forever? Research on treatments for ageing is examined in a new Council briefing note.

Research on the biological processes of ageing is aiming to identify interventions that might delay ageing and the onset of age-related diseases and conditions. Research has led to the discovery of several potential interventions for ageing, including medicines, stem cell and gene therapies, and 'young blood' transfusions. Some interventions are already being tested on humans in clinical trials.

If a safe and effective treatment for ageing was discovered it could have far reaching consequences for the economy, personal identity and how people live and work later in life. For example, enabling older adults to be more active and live longer could have many benefits for individuals, families, and communities. However, access to ageing interventions is likely to be unequal, leading to an exacerbation of existing health inequalities.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics today [1/10/18] publishes the first in a new series of bioethics briefing notes. *The search for a treatment for ageing* explores the latest scientific developments in the burgeoning field of ageing research, and identifies the key ethical and social issues raised.

Large amounts of public and private funding are being directed to this area, particularly in the US. For example, Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page are behind biotechnology company *Calico*, which is seeking to "devise interventions that enable people to lead longer and healthier lives".

Terrie Moffitt, Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Duke University, in North Carolina, who contributed to the Council's briefing note, said: "In the US, we are seeing huge market demand for ageing research, which is being driven primarily by private investors. The briefing is a thorough look at the burgeoning landscape of ageing research and an excellent resource for those interested in ageing technologies."

Julian Hughes, RICE Professor of Old Age Psychiatry, University of Bristol, and Deputy Chair of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, said: "The potential ethical and social implications of treatments for ageing are numerous although, at this stage, uncertain. There could be economic gains, but there are differences of opinion about the morality of extending lifespan and whether a focus on finding medical treatments for ageing is helpful. These are just some of the issues highlighted that we need to be thinking about."

People are living longer and healthier lives, but are often spending a significant number of their later years in poor health. Given that the number of older people is predicted to continue to increase over the next 25 years, addressing age-related health conditions is a pressing societal challenge.

'Healthy ageing' was named as one of the four key Health Advanced Research Programmes (HARP) in the UK Government's recent Life Sciences Industrial Strategy, which aims to create entirely new healthcare industries. The strategy acknowledges healthy ageing as a 'crucial goal' for society with significant commercial opportunities.

Notes to Editors

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics is an independent body that has been advising policy makers on ethical issues in bioscience and medicine for more than 25 years. As well as

being a key UK partner on international networks of advisory bodies, the Council has an international reputation for advising policy-makers and stimulating debate in bioethics. The Council is funded by the Nuffield Foundation (of which Professor Moffitt is a Trustee), the Medical Research Council, and Wellcome.

A note of the 2016 Council workshop on the ethics of ageing research and a background paper that informed the workshop are available at <http://nuffieldbioethics.org/project/ethics-ageing-research>

The Council will publish further bioethics briefing notes in 2018. The next notes will focus on whole genome sequencing of newborn babies, and applications of artificial intelligence in healthcare.

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