

A Name for Clone Babies: 'Hoax'

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WASHINGTON -- The independent scientist and journalist brought in by Clonaid to verify its successful cloning of a human denounced its claim on Monday as a possible "elaborate hoax" and halted his review.

Michael Guillen, a physicist and freelance journalist, said the company, Clonaid, had not given him access to the family of the first cloned baby it claimed was born to an American mother. Guillen, a former ABC science journalist, was to select the independent experts who would perform the genetic testing needed to prove the existence of a clone.

Clonaid, linked with a group that believes life on Earth was originally cloned by aliens, said two women had given birth to babies it had cloned. It at first said it would present DNA evidence but has delayed doing so.

"This morning, I suspended the independent review process designed to determine whether or not a cloned human baby has been born," Guillen said in a statement.

"The team of scientists has had no access to the alleged family and, therefore, cannot verify firsthand the claim that a human baby has been cloned. In other words, it's still entirely possible Clonaid's announcement is part of an elaborate hoax intended to bring publicity to the Raelian movement."

Leading scientists around the world believe the group's claim is a hoax.

On Saturday the Dutch branch of the Raelian movement -- which believes aliens have visited Earth and are the source of life on the planet -- said a Dutch lesbian had given birth to a cloned baby. On Dec. 27 the group said a 31-year-old American had given birth to the first human clone, named Eve.

Usually, scientific claims are accompanied by some kind of proof, and are submitted to experts for review by peers of the researchers before the results are made public, most often through publication in scientific journals.

But the Raelian claims bypassed this process, **hitting television screens and newspapers at the height of the Christmas and New Year holidays** -- when news is often scarce.

"It was a slow news period. They totally knew what they were doing," said Michael Manganiello, president of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research.

"I think they timed it," agreed Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania.

"I think they picked Christmas week deliberately."

Caplan complained about the media coverage of the claims. "Nobody should get a story until they produce evidence. No matter how telegenic they are, no matter how many Star Fleet Command uniforms they have, if you don't show up with a baby or a parent or a DNA test, or some witnesses who are credible, you shouldn't have a story."

It would be easy to offer proof, said Dr. Robert Lanza, medical director of Massachusetts-based [Advanced Cell Technology](#). "They are claiming to have the expertise to clone people and they didn't even buy a home DNA kit?" he

asked. "The samples could have been taken by someone in junior high school. That only adds to their complete lack of credibility."

Cloning researchers fear they will be tarred with the same brush as Clonaid, and their research will suffer as a result.

"It's very clear everyone has, rightfully so, proven these people to be the kooks that they are," said Kevin Wilson, director of public policy for the [American Society for Cell Biology](#). "The problem is, I worry that their kookiness is going to be visited upon research," he added.

"In all likelihood there now (is) going to be a moratorium or a ban (on cloning research)," Lanza said. "It's just damage control at this point."

Lanza's privately owned ACT is a leader in cloning technology, using it not only to make cloned farm animals but also for research on stem cells -- the body's master cells, which scientists hope will someday transform medical research.

Opponents of this research note that it involves the creation of a human embryo, albeit a tiny one, and want it banned. Some members of Congress, including Republican Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, are pushing legislation to do so.

"Multiple laboratories in the United States are working toward mass creation of cloned human embryos to use in research that will kill them," Douglas Johnson, head lobbyist for the National Right to Life Committee, said in a statement.

"In order to prevent such human embryo farms, and the other horrors of human cloning that will follow, the Senate must act quickly to pass the Brownback-Weldon cloning ban."

The United States is not alone in planning legislation.

A spokesman for the European Union's executive said the commission was preparing a report on cloning for the end of February that could lead to new EU legislation by year-end.

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