

From science to healing: shaping the future of medical law and governance

Research Impact

Research led by:

Emma Cave, Professor of Healthcare Law

In collaboration with working groups, panels, committees and advisory fora.



Image Credit: [Olga Kononenko on Unsplash](#)

"Good medical practice is the most important document we publish... By focusing on compassionate, fair workplaces where people feel empowered to speak up, we lay a solid foundation for teamwork and ultimately, safer care for patients."

Charlie Massey, CEO of the General Medical Council, 2024, on the importance of the GMC's Good Medical Practice guidance, developed with the advisory forum that Emma chaired.

Impact at a glance

Emma Cave's contributions have driven meaningful change in public policy and professional practice across three priority areas:

- Guiding national discussions on the regulation of stem cell-based embryo models.
- Modernising professional guidance for healthcare professionals.
- Helping to hold the government to account on matters of health and social care.

What was the problem?

Emma's research seeks to address the ethical and regulatory challenges that arise when medical practices and technologies evolve beyond the scope of existing law and professional guidance. As innovations such as stem cell-based embryo models emerge, they often fall outside current laws, creating gaps in oversight. Additionally, professional medical guidelines can be outdated, absent, or insufficient, highlighting the need for ethically robust, accountable frameworks that prioritise patient safety and professional integrity.

How Emma's research made a difference

- Emma's research and legal expertise played an integral role in the development of a staged pathway for the regulation of stem cell-based embryo models. Emma chaired a Nuffield Council on Bioethics Working Group and co-drafted a [report](#), which developed a phased approach to governance.
- Emma has contributed to the formation of national guidance for health professionals. She has co-developed a number of professional guidelines, including chairing the [General Medical Council's advisory forum on Good Medical Practice](#). Since 2024, Emma has sat on the [British Medical Association's Medical Ethics Committee](#), which [debates medical ethics issues and produces guidance for doctors](#).
- Since 2022, Emma has been a core member of the [Health and Social Care Committee Independent Expert Panel](#), which scrutinises government policy and progress on key medical issues such as patient safety and sets out reports to which the government responds.
- Emma co-convened the [Medical Expert Group](#), providing evidence to the [Infected Blood Inquiry](#), which was much cited in the final [Infected Blood Report](#). Emma is also a member of the ethics advisory group to the [COVID-19 Every Story Matters campaign](#). The Covid-19 Every Story Matters Campaign is the largest public engagement exercise ever undertaken by a UK public inquiry; Emma's work within the advisory group ensures that the highest ethical standards are maintained during the campaign.



Conducting independent evaluations into patient safety and the field of medical ethics are key aspects of Emma's research (Image credit, www.unsplash.com).

"The NCOB's review identifies the points of greatest ethical concern in relation to the potential use of SCBEMs and sets out what policy makers and those who have an influence on this field of research could do now to help address them."

Nuffield Department, Women's and Reproductive Health, 2025 on the importance of the NCOB report chaired by Emma on stem cell-based embryo models.

What's happened since?

- In May 2025 Emma presented at the [Nuffield Council on Bioethics \(NCOB\) roundtable](#), which set out the council's recommendations on the regulation on stem cell-based embryo models. The roundtable was attended by regulators and government ministers, who are giving them consideration.
- Influenced by Emma's research, significant changes were made in 2024 to the General Medical Council's professional standards for doctors, [Good Medical Practice](#). Good Medical Practice is the core professional practice guidance by which doctors are educated, guided and held to account.
- Emma and colleague's expert evidence which was presented during The Infected Blood Inquiry found that the infected and affected were failed repeatedly. The [government response](#) includes a full apology and a promise of redress.

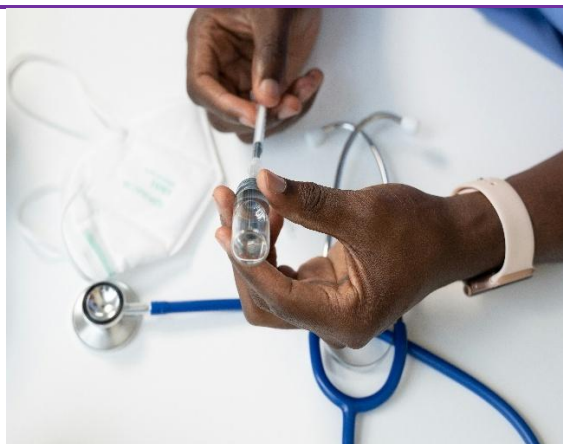


Image credit: [Nappy Studio via Unsplash](#)

"Investigations into major failures in the NHS, like the Thirlwall Inquiry into Letby, are vital but it's equally important to hold the government and leaders of organisations responsible for actually implementing the recommendations that are made to improve patient safety."

Steve Brine MP, Health and Social Care Committee chairman on the importance of the 2024 Health and Social Care Committee's Independent Expert Panel Report on Patient Safety, which Emma played a core role in producing.



What next?

- Emma's research continues to advocate for the prioritisation of ethics integration in shaping cultural change across the NHS, enhancing accountability mechanisms, supporting staff wellbeing, and reforming outdated regulatory and legal structures.
- Emma is currently working as part of the Health and Social Care Committee's Independent Expert Panel to complete an [evaluation of Palliative Care](#) in England. Recommendations from the Expert Panel will inform government decision making.
- Working toward wider reform of the regulation of biotechnologies, Emma is advancing her research on the regulation of [stem cell-based embryo models](#) and contributing to a major review of the 14 day rule governing embryo culture as part of a NCoB working group.


News reporting on the issue

Articles where Emma is quoted	News articles Emma has written
Infected blood scandal: Children were used as 'guinea pigs' in clinical trials. BBC News, 18 April 2024	Research on embryo models needs soft and hard regulation. Research Professional News, 11 Dec 2024
Anna Meisel, Abortion arrest: Recording reveals police concern. BBC News, 27 May 2025	Regulatory strategy for embryo models set out. BioNews. 6 Jan 2025

Video content

 <p>Watch Emma speaking at the PET Event: What Can the Fertility Sector Learn from the Infected Blood Scandal and Inquiry? BioNews, 12 March 2025</p>	 <p>Emma shares her expertise in this ITV Exposure documentary: Britain's 'Virginity' Clinics Uncovered.</p>
 <p>Watch Emma giving evidence to the Infected Blood Inquiry: Medical Ethics Experts – Expert Group Panellists, Infected Blood Inquiry 26/01/2021</p>	

Social Media Presence

	<p>Follow Emma on Linked In and on Twitter @profEmmaCave, where she posts regularly about her work.</p>
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Find out more

- Read more about Emma's research and advocacy work on her [Wikipedia page](#).
- Learn about Emma's collaborative work with the NCOB [on Stem Cell-Based Embryo Models](#) and the [14 Day Rule for Human Embryo Research](#).
- Learn how Emma's research helps hold the government to account through her work with the Health and Social Care Committee's [Independent Expert Panel](#) and their evaluations of the government's commitment to the [digitisation of the NHS](#); commitments in the area of pharmacy and government progress on meeting [patient safety recommendations](#).
- Find out about the British Medical Association [Medical Ethics Committee](#). The MEC debates ethical issues on the relationship between the medical profession, the public and the state.
- Read the guidance for healthcare staff that Emma produced as part of a working party with The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists on the [Involvement of the Police and External Agencies following Abortion, Pregnancy Loss and Unexpected Delivery](#).
- Listen to Emma's expert input on the BBC File on 4 Podcast: [Abortion on Trial: The Nicola Packer Story](#). The podcast explores legal and ethical tensions in healthcare reporting and Emma's input shed light on patient confidentiality, duty of care, and the risks of deterring vulnerable individuals from seeking medical help.



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