

## EXPERTS WELCOME ABORTION DEBATE

Abortion is an issue which divides almost every section of society, but none more so than the medical practitioners who have to take the decisions which mean life or death for an unborn foetus.

The case of baby Natasha Smith has heightened the debate on when and whether it is proper to terminate a pregnancy.

Yesterday, some of Scotland's most eminent health experts argued both sides of the case.

**Dr Jim Robbins**, a consultant obstetrician at the Royal Alexandra Infirmary in Paisley and a member of the ethics committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: "This case is not abortion by any definition it is a clear ethical case of maternal-foetal conflict.

"Doctors working in this area always welcome debate on fundamental issues such as abortion. It may be that we need to reassess upper limits now that we have a better understanding of foetal physiology but I would remind people that viability, which is the main argument, is a practical argument and not an ethical argument."

**Callum McKellar** of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics said: "The SCHB would welcome any new debate in Scotland relating to the time-limit up until when an abortion is possible.

"This follows the experience of Norelle Smith who successfully gave birth to her daughter after she stopped growing at 22

weeks of gestation. Abortion laws in the UK should be redrafted; other European states are often very shocked when they realise what is taking place here. The experience of Norelle Smith shows that UK laws were never really based on sound medical evidence."

**John Haldane**, a professor of philosophy at St Andrews University and director of the Centre for Ethics and Public Affairs, said: "Our knowledge of embryological development is far more advanced than at the beginning of the pro-choice movement. They argued that the foetus in the womb was not a human person, just a ball of cells, therefore abortion was not wrong. That argument now looks increasingly strained. The pro-choice argument has now switched from denying the foetus is a human being to claiming it is sometimes all right to destroy a human being.

"The embryological evidence has favoured the pro-lifers which has put the pro-choicers on the back foot.

**Dr Timothy Chappell**, senior lecturer in philosophy at Dundee University said: "A story like [Ms Smith's] shows that there are options available between having a normal birth and having an abortion, which are not being explored. Besides aborting, we could choose to induce babies. Maybe if we had developed technologies such as embryo transfer at an early stage, say in rape cases, then an option other than abortion might have been open to the woman in such a case."