

# The need for dialogue

by Researcher Mika Suzuki, Uehiro Research Division for iPS Cell Ethics

Recently, the word “dialogue” has been on my mind. For example, the other morning I was watching the news and heard that a disagreement between two parties would be resolved by dialogue. But the news never explained what type of dialogue. Is it chatting while enjoying tea together? The Cabinet Office has announced its initiative, Science and Technology Dialogue with the public. This dialogue is defined as interactive communication in which researchers explain their research outcomes and activities to society in an easy-to-understand manner. The Cabinet Office recognizes the importance of dialogue to gain public understanding and support for further development of science and technology. Even CiRA uses the word. The Uehiro Research Division for iPS Cell Ethics at CiRA states on its Japanese website that it wishes to have dialogue with the public to understand all perspectives about human iPS cells.

In all these cases, dialogue aims to gain the understanding and support of the general public, and then resolve concerns by providing explanations and answers. It is based on the assumption that if people understand the issues and satisfy their questions, then they are likely to support the idea. But is this assumption true? Dialogue involves not only explaining but also listening.

For me, dialogue is about an exchange of ideas with the purpose of reaching new ideas, not convincing other people to agree with you. In this concept, dialogue removes positions or titles. First and foremost, researchers are human beings before they are scientists.

If researchers have dialogue with the public on

the use of iPS cells, they should share their values and what they think is appropriate use of iPS cells while providing a scientific, rational and objective explanation. And the public should be granted the opportunity to talk about their values and not only ask questions that satisfy their scientific curiosity. I think such dialogue is necessary to find where both sides can agree. It is important for scientists to remember that especially in the field of iPS cells, all people are affected by this science and technology. Many of the opinions from the general public will not be based on science, but on how lives will be impacted. Science alone cannot answer these concerns.

Have we had this type of dialogue about iPS cells? I am not sure that we have. It has been 10 years since the discovery of human iPS cells, and I have been working as a bioethicist at CiRA for five years. Now more than ever, I feel strongly the form of dialogue needs to change. This is a goal of mine at CiRA.

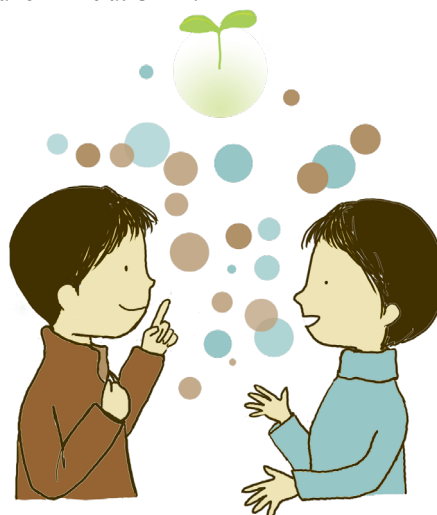


Illustration by Maiko Tanaka, *dialogue*