Impact of Egg, Sperm, and Embryo Donor Conception on Families

The Role of Fertility Clinics

By Wendy Kramer
Co-founder and Director of the Donor Sibling Registry

In your role as an infertility clinician, you can have a profound effect on parents’ feelings about using donor conception, choosing an open versus anonymous donor, their attitudes on disclosure, a child’s right to know the methodology of higher conception, and a child’s curiosity and desire to search for biological relatives.

Infertility clinicians can help parents realize that many donor offspring feel curious about their genetic, ancestral, and medical backgrounds, and that choosing an anonymous donor can have difficult consequences for families down the road.

Evolving Feelings and Mixed Messages

Our research shows that donors’ feelings can change over time, as can the feelings of parents and children in their approach to donor conception. Some parents feel more confident about it as their children grow older, and some gain confidence through better educating themselves. Some have been offered...

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Fertility Care in the Midst of Healthcare Reform: An Uncertain Future

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Among much controversy and debate, President Obama signed into law a new healthcare reform policy last year. This healthcare reform law, known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), consists of two components—the ACA and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act. Starting in 2010, this legislation provides numerous healthcare provisions that will be implemented over the next 4 years.

This complicated act will generate many changes to the current healthcare delivery system, including improved access to basic healthcare coverage, insurance reforms, required employer coverage and tax reporting, funding for specific healthcare research, and overhauls for the subsidized college lending program.

This new bill has given many Americans new patient rights and benefits. But how does this new law affect reproductive medicine? At present, the answers are few.

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Implications of Hydrosalpinges for IVF Outcomes

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Tubal factor infertility is a common indication for treatment using in vitro fertilization (IVF). Although individuals with proximal (isthmic) tubal occlusion have excellent success rates using IVF, it has been shown in numerous studies that distal disease leading to a dilated hydrosalpinx has a deleterious effect on IVF outcome. Exactly how the presence of a hydrosalpinx affects IVF success rates is not well understood, but it has been proposed...

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I urge you to initiate discussions at your clinic about how to incorporate into your practice the needs of people born through donor conception, before conception. The donors and the recipients need appropriate counseling and information so that they could make fully educated decisions.

Among donor offspring, 87% desire to connect with their half siblings, and of those who are not in contact with their donors, 83% wish to be. Furthermore, 75.5% recommend using a willing-to-be-known donor, urging future parents to consider the implications on the child.

1. "Consider every possible emotion that your child could go through. Emotionally, this can be a very difficult issue for donor children, even as adults. Make sure, if you decide to go through with it, that you have answers to the questions your child will ask. (That can be everything from medical history to marital status to family questions, job, interests... anything.) That’s the difficult part for me, sometimes. I don’t have any answers.

2. "I would say please, please be honest with your child about their origins from day 1. It is the right and best thing to do. My parents never told anybody that they’d used a sperm donor, but the truth still came out eventually. I can’t tell you how big a shock it was to discover at the age of 25 that the man I think of as my dad isn’t my biological father.

3. "I think that a donor who is willing to be known is extremely important. At the very least, a donor-conceived child should have genetic and medical information available to them."

Some 23% of sperm donors and 34.2% of egg donors say that they or close family relatives have health concerns or genetic risk factors that they have learned of since donating.

The Donor Sibling Registry

DSR was founded in 2000 to assist individuals conceived by sperm, egg, or embryo donation who are seeking to make mutually desired contact with others with whom they share genetic ties. With more than 30,350 current members, the DSR has helped to connect more than 9,175 donor offspring with their half siblings and/or sperm or egg donors and has initiated national research in this area. For more information visit www.donsiblingregistry.com.