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Men still donating sperm

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NEW laws removing sperm donors' right to anonymity have not stopped men volunteering, official figures released today show.

It had been feared that rules which came into force in April 2005 enabling future children to trace their biological father would lead to a fall in donations.

But the first full-year figures from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) since the change show a 6% rise in the number of men registering as donors.

A total of 265 new sperm donors (of which 208 were based in the UK) were registered with the HFEA in the 12 months to 31 March last year.

That compares with just 250 (including 197 in the UK) the previous year.

It is the first time that full figures have been available for the first year of the new system as many clinics do not register donors with the HFEA until they have completed the lengthy screening process.

Donor numbers had been falling over a 10-year period and recent reports have pointed to a shortage of sperm reaching apparently crisis levels - widely attributed to the removal of anonymity.

At one point last year there was just one active donor covering the whole of Scotland - a figure which has now risen to three.

A spokeswoman for the National Gamete Donation Trust (NGDT) said that part of the reason for the decline was the decision by many clinics to stop recruitment amid uncertainty over the future of the system while the changes were being discussed.

HFEA chair Shirley Harrison said: "Many commentators continue to claim that the change in the law to remove anonymity for sperm and egg donors would lead to an immediate and steep fall in the number of donors.

"These new figures show that the predicted drop in sperm donor numbers is a myth."

She added: "Professionals working in the sector say that there are a complex set of reasons which led to a fall in donor numbers from 1997 onwards."

NGDT chair Laura Witjens welcomed the increase but said the number of donors were still far short of the estimated 500 donors needed to meet demand.

"The most important lesson that can be learned from this is that recruiting donors can be done," she said.

"First and foremost it requires a willingness to put the effort in, something that is not happening across the sector.

"The focus should continue to be on raising awareness and recruiting willing-to-be-known egg and sperm donors.

"These statistics give hope and show we are on the right path regarding the sperm donors but a lot more needs to be done to recruit egg donors."

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