

EASTER EGG SHARING TO GIVE COUPLES HOPE OF NEW LIFE
Empathy and altruism key motivators for donors

Easter has a strong tradition of celebrating fertility, eggs and new life. Bourn Hall, the world's first IVF clinic, aims to use this association to raise awareness of the benefits of egg sharing to both the donor and the recipient.

Mike Macnamee, Chief Executive at Bourn Hall wants to encourage more couples to consider participation in an egg-sharing programme, which offers donors the opportunity for free IVF treatment.

"There are groups of women for whom only the donation of an egg can fulfil their hope of motherhood. These include women that have undergone premature menopause, those that have had chemotherapy, where there is a high risk of inherited disorders or where poor egg quality has resulted in recurrent treatment failure. These women will only be able to conceive if they are given donated eggs.

"Naturally, egg donation needs careful consideration, but for those that do go ahead it can be a life enhancing decision.

"As a benefit for participation in an egg share programme the donor is given free IVF and embryo transfer while donating half their eggs to a needy patient.

Last Easter, Bourn Hall launched an 'Easter Dozen' appeal for altruistic egg donors and this encouraged more than a dozen women to come forward and resulted in twelve couples being offered the chance of eggs. As a direct result of the campaign eleven babies have been delivered or are expected.

The need for the campaign arose when a change in legislation in 2005 meant that donor anonymity was removed when any resulting child reached 18, this halved the number of donors coming forward and extended waiting times. Following the success of the 2006 Easter Dozen Appeal, donors, recipients and pregnancy rates have exceeded the 2004 levels.

The campaign also highlighted that many couples are unaware of the benefits of participating in an egg share programme and that this might offer them affordable access to high quality IVF treatment. Egg share donors must be fit, healthy and under the age of 35.

Bourn Hall has found that patients have empathy with others going through a similar experience and that they are more receptive to sharing programmes. It has set up a sperm sharing scheme at the clinic to help reduce waiting times for sperm donation and hopes that it will be as successful as the egg sharing programme.

These findings are supported by results from a study investigating women's attitudes towards egg donation by Satvinder Purewal and Olga van den Akker, School of Life & Health Sciences, Aston University, so far about 430 women have responded and early findings show that there is a strong altruistic underpinning to why women choose to donate their eggs.

"From the preliminary findings I can report that the women most likely to donate their eggs are those that strongly believe it is a good way to help a childless couple." comments Satvinder Purewal. "They are likely to view the consequences of egg donation in a positive way, would be happy that her genes were being passed on, feel as though she had made a contribution to mankind and would want information regarding the wellbeing of any child that resulted.

"Women that felt they had control over their decision and support from significant others in their lives were also more likely to donate." she said.

Evidence from Bourn Hall has also shown high pregnancy success rates in women that participate in egg share programmes.

To be an egg sharer the patient undergoes IVF treatment as usual. After eggs are collected they are shared between the donor and the recipient. Sharing only occurs when more than eight eggs are produced.

Couples considering participation in an egg-sharing programme are invited to call Gillian Bellars on 01954 717221 to discuss this further.

-ENDS -

Case-studies

Egg recipient

'Sarah', 39, had almost given up hope of being a mother; she had been married for 18 years, and spent 10 trying for a baby.

"I had five cycles of IUI locally before starting IVF treatment at Bourn Hall, this was when the problem with my eggs was discovered. They recommended that I should go on the waiting list for a donated egg.

"I waited for two years and really didn't expect that anyone would donate an egg. Then I got the wonderful news. I fell pregnant first time and I am now expecting a baby in mid April.

"It feels really good. I had almost given up hope of having a baby and I just couldn't believe it at first. It is such an amazing feeling to be pregnant.

"I think our family and friends had given up on us, I have two brothers and a sister and they all had children ages ago, so it is wonderful news for everyone.

"I am very grateful to the person that has made this possible."

- ENDS -

Notes for editors

Research into women's attitudes towards oocyte (egg) donation, and women's reasons for and against parenthood is being run by Aston University. <http://webct3.aston.ac.uk/lhs/naps/> .

Women wishing to participate should contact: Satvinder Purewal, Psychology, School of Life & Health Sciences, Aston University, Birmingham, B4 7ET. Email purewals@aston.ac.u

- ENDS -

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About Bourn Hall Clinic

Bourn Hall Clinic, is the world's first and best known assisted conception clinic, established in 1980 by Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards, the pioneers of IVF. Through innovative thinking the clinic maintains a leading role in the field.

Bourn Hall Limited is located at Bourn Hall, Bourn, Cambridge, CB3 7TR, UK
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