

Gamete Donation in the UK

Egg and sperm donation in the UK is carried out in clinics which are licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority - all donors are identity-release or known donors. Donors are recompensed for their time. Lesbian couples and single women can be treated in UK fertility clinics, but will often have to pay for treatment.

Our current system in the UK is the result of much debate and legislation - until 2005, donation in the UK was anonymous unless couples used known donors, but the law was changed to reflect the changing mood on the subject. In 2008 there were other changes which removed the need for clinics to consider the "need for a father" when treating patients, thus opening the door for lesbian couples and single women.

Looking back over the legislation and enquiries, and at the role played by trusts and societies and patient groups in this, will help explain how and why we have chosen this route for the use of donor gametes in the UK.

Although this system may appear to be working well, there are still some hot issues which the patient charities have been working to highlight. We have shortages of egg and sperm donors, and many UK patients are travelling overseas for donor treatment or importing donor sperm into the UK. We have no clear data on the numbers as this can be arranged entirely privately.

We also have some women using private online services to find sperm donors which sometimes operate in grey areas of the law - just four years ago there was a high profile case where two men were convicted for providing sperm through an illegal website.

In order to help solve some of the problems, the government has just given funding for the UK's first ever sperm bank - to be run in the Midlands in an attempt to ensure that couples do not look overseas. As far as egg donors are

concerned, egg sharing schemes are also making inroads into long waiting lists.

The patient charities in the UK are part of a group the Association of Fertility Patient Organisations (AFPO) in the UK - this group is co-ordinated and chaired by Infertility Network UK and other members include the Donor Conception Network, the National Gamete Donation Trust, the Multiple Births Foundation, Progress Educational Trust, Surrogacy UK and the Daisy Network. AFPO meets twice a year and at the same time holds a meeting with the regulator, the HFEA, to ensure there is a regular exchange of information and views between the regulator and patient representatives.

Dott. Sa Catherine Brian