

Purchasing Sperm

Why do people need to purchase sperm?

People having fertility treatment may need to purchase donor sperm for a variety of reasons.

Donated sperm is freely given by men of above average health and is rigorously screened by fertility units before being made available for use in any treatment. Identifying information about donors is stored in central records at the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) (www.hfea.gov.uk.)

While donated sperm is an important part of fertility treatment, over the past few years it has become increasingly difficult to get supplies for those who need it. This leaflet describes the ways MFS can help.

What problems are associated with purchasing sperm?

- **donor anonymity**

The combination of stricter screening and a change to law in April 2005 lifting donor anonymity means many men have stopped regularly donating to all UK clinics.

This shortage means there are fewer samples to choose from, the cost to MFS of purchasing sperm from other clinics has increased, and considerable time is spent matching requests for MFS patients with those of the stocks held by other clinics.

The April 2005 law regarding donor anonymity means that any child conceived as a result of sperm donated after 1 April 2005 will be able, on reaching the age of 18 - or sooner if they are to marry - to access identifying information about the donor, if they wish. No sperm donated before 1 April 2005 can be used in licensed fertility treatment unless it is for a sibling to an existing child.

- **infection screening**

All fertility clinics are required to screen both the donor and recipient for the cytomegalovirus (CMV). Knowledge of this virus is important because, if contracted in pregnancy, it may have an effect rather like rubella (German measles). Unfortunately, although immunisation against rubella is possible, there is no vaccine against CMV.

This may not matter because there are very few cases of infection with CMV in pregnancy in the UK, and none proven to have followed the use of infected sperm. Although there is probably no risk, it is not permitted to use sperm from a man who has been exposed to CMV in a woman who has not. This reduces the choice of sperm available, especially to women who are not naturally immune to CMV.

- **safe storage of sperm samples**

Sperm is kept frozen in liquid nitrogen in sperm banks filled with liquid nitrogen. These banks are linked to a 24 hour alarm system which alerts MFS to any sudden increase in temperature. However, MFS cannot guarantee against sudden catastrophic failure.

If sudden failure happens, there is danger that patient samples may be destroyed.

- **pregnancy limits**

Sperm cannot be used after 10 live birth events from a single donor have been reported, unless it is for a sibling pregnancy. This means that it may suddenly become impossible to use perfectly good samples a patient has paid for.

How can MFS help a patient to purchase sperm?

When a patient decides they want to conceive using donor sperm, their fertility nurse specialist will discuss availability and make a request to MFS laboratory staff to source a suitable supply. Usually it is only possible to match ethnicity, CMV status, eye and hair colour.

Some basic information about every donor is always available and may be read by the patient if they wish.

How much does it cost to purchase sperm?

Please refer to the current price list in the 'Patients' Guide to Services' or in the fees section of www.midlandfertility.com

Once a sperm sample has been purchased, if a patient becomes pregnant before and some of the sample remains, she will know there is some left over which may be used for future treatment.

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