

Egg Donor Experience ~ Anonymous

I volunteered to harvest eggs for a friend, whose ovaries had ceased producing eggs in her early 30's. She bought donated sperm from a California university sperm bank several years prior to my egg harvest and was being counseled about infertility options. This was not an "eggs for money" contract. I volunteered without a compensation obligation.

My experience began with an appointment to determine if I was a qualified egg producing candidate. I was 30 "something," athletic, bright, employed as a professional, and married, with no children -- yet. I talked to my husband and friends about it and their main concern was the medical risks to me.

My husband (who has children from a previous marriage) agreed to be supportive and the appointments with the psychologist were scheduled -- one with me alone and one with my husband and me. The questions were general and focused on my benevolence notwithstanding my being childless. The psychologist completed notes for the file and my husband and I signed a general acknowledgement of "counseling."

I am a marathon runner and I was asked to stop running two months before the hormone drugs and estrogen level testing began. I was told that the mileage of my training would inhibit the follicle production and the clinic demanded as much control over my lifestyle as possible. I stopped running in January 1992.

I scheduled the clinic appointments and initiated administering the drugs in March 1992. After 21 days, I had 35 Lupron injections, which were self-administered in my thigh, daily, for synchronization with my friend receiving the eggs; daily estrogen level testing; and followed with several Pergonal injections to hyperstimulate my ovaries to produce the mature eggs, which my husband administered. Then I received the final injection to release the eggs for the surgical egg retrieval process. When the clinic determined my hormones levels were ready for egg retrieval, the hospital appointment was scheduled and more paperwork was signed, including, the infertility doctor and anesthesiologist forms. I had headaches, abdomen bloating and extreme lethargy which the clinic indicated were normal side affects.

Twenty-Eight eggs were retrieved and all eggs were fertilized, resulting in 28 healthy embryos. Five days after the egg retrieval procedure my abdomen continued to protrude and elimination became difficult. I called the clinic and they said to meet the doctor at the hospital. It was determined I had ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) and I needed to be admitted to the hospital. I was told that the severity of the OHSS was exerting dangerous levels of pressure on my organs. I was in the hospital for 5 days and I was told, "in lay terms -- you are at 7 on a scale of 1-10, and 10 is death." I had to use five sick days at work and the expense incurred was not covered by my medical insurance. My friend (the recipient of my eggs) paid for my hospital and doctor bills.

In December 1992, nine months after donating my eggs, I received a telephone call from my gynecologist letting me know that my annual exam/pap revealed stage 4 cervical cancer and surgeries (a cone biopsy first, and, subsequently, a hysterectomy) needed to be scheduled. In February 1993 I had the two surgeries and thankfully the cervical cancer had not invaded organs or other areas of my body. I was disappointed I no longer had the option to give birth to my own children, however, felt blessed that the cancer was not invasive. I remain cancer-free.

The recipient was in her 40's and the success rate of embryo implantation decreases with age, so it was not a surprise that the first implant attempts were not successful. The fourth attempt however did produce a healthy pregnancy and a single birth with the recipient delivering at full term and the baby and mother being healthy. The successful implant procedure used five frozen embryos which were implanted two years after my eggs were retrieved.

I was told that the remaining embryos were in storage for about a year subsequent to the birth and my friend informed me that she no longer could afford to pay for their storage. She said documents were prepared for her to sign consenting to the storage facility "destroying" the two remaining frozen embryos.