

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am the mother of Jacqueline Rushton who died as a direct result of in vitro fertilisation treatment in the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, Ireland, on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2003. I have never spoken in public before and hope you will appreciate how this is a very daunting task for me. I feel I owe this to my beloved daughter Jacqui whose only wish was to have a baby.

She put herself into the hands of experts and she lost her own life in her attempt to give life. These words were spoken at her funeral by the priest. At that time we knew something had gone terribly wrong, but had not got the knowledge we now have. She wanted her story told.

Jacqueline was a beautiful girl in every way. She was a healthy fit thirty-two year old who was longing for a baby. Her dream was to have a big family and stay at home and look after them.

In 2002 she went to her local G.P. to discuss fertility problems. It was discovered that Jacqui was not ovulating properly, that was her problem. She was referred to the Fertility Unit at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin.

She and her husband paid 3,000 euro to the clinic and in November 2002 Jacqui commenced I.V.F. treatment. This meant inhaling a drug to put her into a false menopause. She forgot to take it one day while out shopping with her sister and laughingly said as she inhaled at the bus stop, 'Oh! I hope people won't think I'm a drug addict '.

She was excited about the prospect that she might find out that she was pregnant on Christmas Day, God love her!

She had to inject herself daily with Puregon, the ovarian stimulating drug. On day eight, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec, her levels of estradiol were three times higher than the highest level in the range.

There were two possible treatment options available:

To cancel or to cut down the drug and coast.

At no time were they told to cancel. Only coasting was advised which they did. By cutting down the estradiol it was hoped to bring down the levels to a safe one for the administration of HcG, the drug which releases the egg, and which is the point of no return. They were never shown any figures of safe levels of Estradiol or safe numbers of eggs.

I went to hospital with Jacqui on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec. The drug was cut to 100 units puregon. She was feeling very bloated and could hardly walk.

She spent her time in bed the week of the treatment and I brought all her meals up to her. She felt so sore and swollen. Jacqui was saying 'I never thought it would so hard to have a baby.'

On Day ten, but she received no injection, she was so overstimulated. When she went for her scan it showed multiple follicles and the promise of a large amount of eggs. Jacqui thought this was good news, as I did, demonstrating how little we knew about safety levels. I got talking to another girl while waiting. She was also in great distress, but not as bad as Jacqui.

She could not believe how awful a procedure it was turning out to be.

When the nurse came out with Jacqui she said laughingly, 'Oh! Here are the overstimulated ones'. They both had difficulty walking. Poor Jacqui! She was always so good humoured and tried to smile through all her pain.

That evening she even made us bring down the Christmas Tree from the attic. This was always her job and she didn't trust anyone else to get it just right. She had great taste and was very artistic. She sat on the couch and gave all her instructions but eventually she struggled even to kneel down. Her tummy was so tight and it hurt so much.

Jacqui and her husband went to the clinic on day eleven. At 10 o'clock that night Jacqui received the HcG Injection. Only a nurse was present. Her Estradiol level was 22,500 pmols, more than twice the safety level. The Authorisation Form was signed by Professor Robert Harrison.

According to the Royal College Guidelines, Jacqui by then had an 80% chance of developing severe ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, which is life threatening.

On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> Dec Jacqui went in for the egg retrieval procedure. 33 eggs were retrieved. When she was brought from the theatre, the other girl who was waiting to go in next told me Jacqui was screaming in pain. It is heartbreaking to hear about your child's suffering.

Most patients go home after egg retrieval and fertilised eggs are implanted two days later in the womb. This couldn't happen for Jacqui. Hers had to be frozen, she was so hyperstimulated.

Everyday till Wednesday we just heard 'Jacqui is not coming home, she has mild hyperstimulation'. One of my daughters phoned me on the Wednesday and said 'Mam, there is something really wrong with Jacqui, she can hardly talk'. I panicked after that phone call and rang the sister in charge and finally got permission to see my daughter.

When I saw Jacqui propped up in the bed, she looked so frail, sick and terrified. She had an oxygen mask clamped to her face. She had a catheter, elastic stockings, a monitor and a drip. I got such a shock I ran over to her and put my arms around her as best I could and said Oh! Jacqui I love you so much. What has happened? She tried to laugh at me, she hated to worry us. I went home that night and cried and cried. The family wouldn't believe she was that bad. I knew Jacqui was very seriously ill. I felt this awful feeling in my heart she was going to die.

We were being constantly told by Doctors and Nurses, 'She'll be alright. She will pass all this fluid out through her kidneys and she'll be grand. We can only monitor and support the symptoms.'

She just got worse every day. I went in on the Thursday. The other girl had also been admitted by ambulance to the hospital. She too was very ill and breathless but she recovered, thank God.

There have, by the way, been 97 cases of OHSS in the Rotunda between 1999 and 2003.

Jacqui was so ill. No one seemed to care, there was no sense of urgency, and nothing was done. She was filling up with fluid from her ovaries. Her lungs were inundated and her breathing was becoming nearly impossible. She was on a huge amount of oxygen. She couldn't eat, drink, sleep, and was constantly nauseous and breathless. Jacqui told me that every breath she took required every ounce of her energy. Her suffering was horrific.

I went in on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> Dec in the evening . Her husband and I were still the only visitors allowed. I was demented as her swelling was increasing alarmingly. Nurses bleeped doctors but none came. Finally at 11 o'clock a drip was put up.

The next day Jacqui told me she was praying to her Guardian Angel when a passing Doctor noted her condition. She was blue from lack of oxygen and he had her admitted to the High Dependency Unit

On Monday I arrived to find Jacqui being prepared to be sent to the Mater General Hospital. I'll never forget that journey; oxygen mask clamped to her little face, terror in her eyes, she was so cold . The nurse and a young doctor tried to reassure me she'd be alright. None of them seemed to realise what severe O.H.S.S. meant.

In the General Hospital no draining of fluid was done initially. Her catheter was found to have been kinked and that seemed to relieve her slightly. She also got a feeding tube. She felt safer there and thought she would get better.

Her sisters and brothers could now visit. Jacqui's deterioration shocked them to the core. Jacqui said between gulps of oxygen, 'Oh Mam I feel awful, it's not getting any better'. Her husband arrived then and we had to go. She looked at me and said 'Mam don't go'. She just looked at us going out the door with her beautiful brown eyes. That was the last time we spoke to Jacqui.

Later that night we got a summons from the hospital. Her husband Danny, her Dad and I rushed in. Only her husband was allowed in. She was being put into a drug induced coma and being placed on a ventilator.

On Christmas Eve we all visited. She looked peaceful and rested on the ventilator. But on the 25<sup>th</sup> Dec her Dad and I were distraught when we saw her. She looked like a little waxen doll. I cried and said to the doctor and nurse who didn't seem to understand us, 'My daughter is going to die in this hospital'.

We were all sent for at 7 o'clock the next morning. They had tried to move her in the bed and the fluid had moved over her heart. She had crashed. They revived her with adrenalin. That day over two litres of fluid were drained from her lungs, 23 days after admission. She had put on over two stone with the fluid.

We spent every minute at her side. Her brother Daniel stayed there nearly constantly praying holding her hand and willing her to live. Jacqui was very religious and had all her little tattered prayer leaflets with her.

But all Jacqui's organs were slowly destroyed. She had five holes in her lungs, five chest drains draining into five horrible buckets around her bed. Her kidneys started to fail, she couldn't take

any nutrition, she was on industrial doses of antibiotics. Next we were told her eyes were fixed indicating brain damage They couldn't close her eyes with the swelling from the fluid, so her eyes had to be taped shut. Eventually her strong heart gave out and all the machines were switched off.

She died at 12 o'clock noon a slow agonising death from O,H.S.S. She had 33 eggs recovered, even though the safe level is well under 20. Five embryos survived; five little potential babies. They were baptised and were buried with Jacqui.

This is the nightmare that happened to my daughter who only wanted to have a baby. This is what we had and have to endure for the rest of our lives. Our carefree family life is gone, Jacqui is missing, destroyed by by unsafe I.V.F. treatment.

We as parents didn't know anything about I.V.F. or its dangers and felt it was the couple's own business what they did, and that we couldn't interfere. Our only worry was that they'd be disappointed if it didn't work.

I want to thank my family for all their research and help since Jacqui's death. They didn't want me to do this as it is so hard. My gut feeling was this is what Jacqui would have wanted, she was a fighter like me and I want justice, she deserves it.

After three nerve wracking inquests, we got a verdict of Medical Misadventure. The professional conduct of the consultant, Professor Robert Harrison, is now being investigated by the Fitness to Practice Committee of the Irish Medical Council.

At her enormous funeral some of the nurses attended. One of those wonderful human beings hugged me close and said its going to be very hard. I knew she meant the grief, and the quest for justice in Ireland, where you have to be a multi-millionaire to get it.

A girl who goes for I.V.F. treatment for infertility, is no different in effect from a girl choosing to donate her eggs for altruistic or financial reasons. They both have to go through the same invasive horrific drug-based treatment.

Why is natural fertility treatment not offered to patients? It should be available as a choice. It is much safer with no drugs. This is the truth. There is indeed an alternative to these harmful drugs, and couples could have their longed for babies, without the pain and risks which cost Jacqui her life.