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EGGS THE FACTOR

[Sunday Mirror, Jun 6, 2010](#) by [LYNNE KELLEHER](#)

HUNDREDS of Irish women in their forties are flying to Spain for donor eggs and donor embryos in last a ditch attempt to have a baby.

The women, many nearing the age of 50, have travelled to the Instituto Marques in Barcelona over the past three years to attempt to get pregnant with the eggs of young European women.

The fertility techniques are so advanced at the clinic that Irish women can receive treatment to make it possible to carry a baby even after the menopause.

Childless couples, samesex couples and single women from Ireland have flown to the Barcelona fertility clinic to obtain donor eggs, donor sperm or donor embryos.

Last year 100 Irish couples and single women were treated, there were 70 treated in 2008 and 50 in 2007.

So far this year 42 couples from Ireland have been treated at the fertility clinic.

While laws in Spain ensure donations of eggs, sperm and embryos are always done anonymously, there is no legislation in Ireland to cover the assisted reproduction treatments.

But the treatment does not come cheap.

The cost of a cycle of egg donation in the clinic is EUR10,000 and with frozen eggs or embryos it costs around EUR2,500.

Dr Victoria Walker, who works at the Barcelona clinic, has seen the number of Irish patients getting treatment double in the last three years because of the legal protection in the country.

She said: "Irish people come here because they are seeking anonymity and ease of access and a nonjudgemental opinion.

"We take whoever comes and try to help them. We can offer egg donation, sperm donation, embryo donation and specialist genetic analysis of embryos before they are put back.

"The legislation over here is liberal. We have more techniques easily available and we also specialise in male fertility. People between the age of 40 and 50 are the main group although we also have a lot of patients under 40.

"We see people who haven't been successful getting pregnant for one reason or another and who may have tried IVF and it hasn't worked.

"We have an ethical age limit of 50. In theory someone could be treated in their 60s or even 70s to make it possible for them to become pregnant but we don't do that."

She said the clinic can help women who have gone into an early menopause to carry a child through egg or embryo donation.

She said: "We have young women - maybe in their thirties - who have had cancer and because of chemotherapy there are no longer fertile.

"We can help women post-menopause and at any age. They don't need their ovaries.

"The uterus can work and support a pregnancy initially with egg donation and sperm donation.

"In a natural pregnancy the ovaries support pregnancy for the first three months but if you don't have ovaries or are in the menopause we can give those hormones artificially.

"At the end of the first three months of pregnancy the placenta takes over hormone production."

Legislation passed by the Spanish parliament guarantees the donor's anonymity and allows the women who donate eggs to be paid a compensation fee for their time.

In Ireland, there is no legislation covering egg donation despite recommendations drawn up five years ago by the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction.

The clinic is supplied with fresh eggs every week from between 15 and 20 healthy European women aged from 18 to 35.

Dr Walker said the women who donate the eggs are screened for any genetic illnesses.

She said: "We screen the donors and check through their own history and pay particular attention to their medical history and their family's medical history.

"We ask them about a long list of illnesses and do a lot of blood tests on them. The eggs come from healthy young women who have zero history of genetic illnesses as far as we can tell.

"The donation is anonymous but we give basic information such as the blood group, the age of female donor and the age of the male donor, height, weight and hair colour, eye colour and skin colour."

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