

Older mothers flock to Spain for egg donor pregnancies

By **Lynne Kelleher**

MORE than 70 Irish babies have been born this year to older mothers who flew to Spain to receive donor eggs from young Mediterranean women.

A hundred Irish women over the age of 40 flew to Barcelona last year to receive donor eggs from young Spanish women in a final bid to conceive.

Almost half of these women were over the age of 45 and opted for egg donation to help with a last-ditch attempt to become pregnant.

Over the past seven years, more than 500 Irish women, mostly in their 40s, have been treated at the Insitut Marques in Barcelona which specialises in implanting embryos made from eggs from young Spanish women and sperm from their partners.

Fertility specialist at the clinic, Dr Victoria Walker, said the clinic is following women's natural reproductive cycles, as the cut-off age of 50 years of age is the average age of women entering the menopause.

She said: 'In Ireland in the 1950s, women were having natural pregnancies in their mid to late 40s.

'The difference is then it would have been child number ten and now it is child number one.

'I don't think that we are pushing the bounds of nature. We have a cut-off age of 50 and we won't let people fall pregnant after that.'

The eggs mainly come from students in their 20s but the clinic accepts eggs from women between the ages of 18 and 35, from all walks of life.

In 2005, more Irish women had children in their 40s than those under the age of 20, for the first time ever.

That trend has continued today with women often choosing to start a family later in life. The latest CSO figures show that in 2009, the average age to have a child was 31 years old.

Meanwhile, last night the HARI Clinic, the national fertility centre based at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin, reported the first Irish pregnancy from a new cutting edge fertility technique known as vitrification.

This method of IVF involves the ultra-rapid freezing of embryos and eggs.

It has been shown to improve both embryo and egg survival rates by as much as 20 per cent. HARI is currently the only clinic licensed by the Irish Medicines Board to freeze eggs.