

Study Helps Predict Which IVF Patients Will Abandon Their Frozen Embryos
Number of children and duration of embryo cryopreservation increase abandonment risk

Salt Lake City, Utah: Dr. Craig Sweet, Medical Director of Embryo Donation International, presented research about embryo abandonment at the recent annual meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. The largest study of its kind, Dr. Sweet and his colleagues conducted a retrospective, case-controlled analysis of 182 cases from a private reproductive endocrine practice. They found 24% (44) of the patients abandoned their frozen embryos.

Most IVF clinics are in possession of abandoned frozen embryos when patients do not pay storage fees or don't communicate their disposition decisions. This presents the clinics with medical, legal and ethical conundrums. The study's objective was to identify patient characteristics that made embryo abandonment more likely to occur. They studied 132 key variables, including demographics, medical histories, IVF insurance coverage, embryology data, financial information and disposition decisions.

The researchers found seven statistically significant predictors of embryo abandonment. The two most relevant variables were the increasing number of children living at home and the length of time the embryos were stored. The risk of abandonment increased almost eight percent for every additional year stored. Other significant predictors included debt to the practice, not completing high school, IVF insurance coverage, a diagnosis of pelvic damage or endometriosis and a large number of cryopreserved embryos.

"There was only one published small study that didn't find any risk factors," said Dr. Sweet. "We hypothesized that if we could predict who was more likely to abandon their embryos, perhaps we could intervene, educate and encourage patients to consider other disposition decisions rather than abandoning their embryos."

Dr. Sweet feels additional research, such as prospective longitudinal studies, are needed to confirm and expand these findings.

The strengths of the study included the size, scope and level of detail examined. The statistical significance was also quite strong, suggesting real and not coincidental findings. Dr. Sweet collaborated with researchers from two Florida universities.

About Dr. Craig Sweet

Dr. Craig Sweet is a board-certified reproductive endocrinologist who founded Embryo Donation International, embryodonation.com, a non-denominational, non-discriminatory full-service embryo donation practice. He also is the medical director of Specialists in Reproductive Medicine & Surgery of Fort Myers, FL.

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