

Chicago Tribune

FOUNDED JUNE 10, 1847

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EDITORIALS

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Embryos can be donated to infertile couples

I read with interest the article by Tribune staff reporter Judith Graham about the growing problem of unused and unclaimed frozen embryos that are in storage at in-vitro fertilization centers around the country and around the world ("Fertility clinics face tough call: Crowded labs feel pressure to discard unwanted embryos," Page 1, Sept. 12).

The article focused mainly on two options: keeping embryos frozen indefinitely or thawing and disposing of these embryos. This presents a dilemma for some couples who, faced with the prospect of paying storage fees indefinitely or disposing of the embryos, decide to break contact with their IVF program secure in the knowledge that the program will not dispose of embryos without their specific permission.

Many couples with frozen

embryos, however, are not aware of a third option: donation of their unused embryos to other couples still experiencing infertility. Embryo donation is performed at no cost to the donating couple and avoids the sticky ethical questions surrounding disposal of embryos.

Last year, President Bush made limited funds available to promote awareness of the embryo donation option, yet most couples are still not aware of it.

Unfortunately many IVF centers in the Chicago area still do not have an embryo donation program. If a couple wishes to donate their unused embryos, however, and their center does not have an active donation program, they can transfer their embryos to another center that does.

Some embryo donation programs will only allow couples

to donate anonymously while others allow couples to make their own rules regarding contact with the recipient couples or the children who are born. This gives some flexibility to couples, some of whom want to have contact with the couples who will receive their embryos and others who don't want to have contact with the recipient couples or any children born to them.

By making couples aware of this option, we can begin to make progress in reducing the numbers of these unclaimed embryos and, at the same time, help infertile couples who otherwise might not be able to conceive and give birth to a child

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