Letters to the Editor

Live birth with sperm cryopreserved for 21 years

Sir,
I read with great interest and enthusiasm the publication about successful pregnancy after 21 years of cryopreservation (Horne et al., 2004). The success achieved in England bettered ours, where we accomplished a successful twin pregnancy after one IVF with ICSI using semen frozen for 20 years (Marik, 1998). These reports should not be considered an issue of record, who has 1 year more or less, but simply proof that sperm can be preserved in the frozen bank for a long, long time with proper care. The results are quite satisfactory and encouraging. It also means that the techniques used two or possibly even three decades ago are working. In our laboratory, we use glycerol, and I assume that in Manchester a similar cryoprotectant was used.

One of the main reasons for my enthusiasm is that this provides information for possible cryopreservation candidates. The success in Manchester was reported by the public media. Unfortunately, patients who need this care are often not properly informed, and physicians who provide treatment can sterilize their patients still, to a considerable degree, forget to inform them about the possibility of cryopreservation. From time to time, a young man breaks into tears in my office when I tell him that he is azoospermic, that he missed his opportunity to preserve his reproductive capability, and that there is not much one can do after the sterilizing surgery, chemotherapy or radiation was completed.

I hope that after we have learned how to preserve sperm successfully for decades, we will also learn how to preserve embryos and ova. There is a lot to be done in this particular area.

Once more, I would like to congratulate the authors.

References

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Reply to ‘Live birth with sperm cryopreserved for 21 years’

Sir,
We would like to thank Dr Marik for his interest in our case report (Horne et al., 2004) and we would also like to congratulate him on his report of a pregnancy after 20 years of sperm cryopreservation (Marik, 1998), of which we were unfortunately not previously aware. While the press coverage of a ‘World Record in Manchester’ was exciting, we agree that the point of interest is not the precise length of time of sperm storage, but the positive message about assisted reproductive technology and the hope it can provide for cancer patients.

The couple involved and our department wished to draw attention to the sperm banking service, provided by ourselves and other hospitals, of which cancer patients and clinicians often seem unaware. In fact, a recent survey in May 2004 of cancer-affected teenagers showed that two-thirds of teenage men are not offered sperm banking or are given incorrect information (The Teenage Cancer Trust, 2004). Hopefully, the media coverage of our case report will go some way towards changing this.

We now routinely give this report and an article by Dr Alan Pacey, who describes his own experience (Pacey, 2003), to all male cancer patients referred to us in order to demonstrate that sperm banking can give genuine hope for the future.

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Multiple births: does the news media influence public perceptions?

Sir,
The article by Child et al. (2004) gives expression to a dynamic every reproductive endocrinologist faces on a daily basis. That dynamic is this: in spite of our best intentions to provide expert counsel, more than a fair share of patients express an interest in multiple gestations. Why do intelligent, informed couples have this preference? This desire may be in part related to costs and a one-stop shopping attitude: a multiple gestation for many couples offers the opportunity to have a family of four (or more) nearly instantaneously with a minimal financial impact at the front end. Aggressive formal