

Informed Consent to Donate Embryos for Research Purposes

This guideline has been prepared by the Ethics Committee and reviewed and approved by the Executive and Council of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

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Abstract

Objective: To develop guidance for clinicians participating in the informed choice process with respect to the donation of human embryos for research purposes.

Recommendations

1. As indicated in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Guidelines and the *Assisted Human Reproduction Act*, specific consent from both the gamete and embryo providers is required before embryos can be used for research purposes. The gamete donors may be different individuals than the embryo providers when donated gametes are used to create embryos.
2. The consent process should inform potential donors of the possible types of (and for final consent, the specific) research project(s) for which the embryos will be used; the risks involved in

donating embryos to research, such as not having these embryos available for their reproductive purposes; the fact that the woman/couple will not benefit personally from donating embryos to research; the potential for commercial gain by others; the possibility that they will be contacted in future about the disposition of the embryos; the fact that confidentiality cannot be absolutely guaranteed.

3. Designation of cryopreserved embryos no longer be required for reproductive purposes to be donated to research, donated to another couple, or discarded should be discussed prior to gamete retrieval and made at the time of cryopreservation, with the understanding that in the future, final consent will be requested. The final decision as to the donation of cryopreserved embryos research should not be made until after the woman/ couple decide they no longer require the embryos for their reproductive purposes. The decision to end cryopreservation should be made separately from the decision regarding disposition of the embryos. The woman/couple will have to be re-contacted regarding the final disposition of their embryos.
4. As a result of lack of scientific data regarding the predictability of microscopic characterization of embryos and potential for pregnancy, it is recommended that all women/couples be offered the opportunity to cryopreserve all embryos not transferred during the treatment cycle and be informed that a failure to cryopreserve all embryos may increase the chance of having to undergo an additional in vitro fertilization cycle to achieve reproductive goals.
5. Research participants should be informed that they may withdraw their consent at any time before the embryos are thawed for research purposes, or, in the case of stem cell research, before a stem cell line is created.
6. Potential donors should be informed that their medical care will not be affected by their decision regarding embryo donation.

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