



Eggs, economy and emotions: Clarifying alternative conception

Kate Lee

When money runs tight, women can make financial ends meet and help other women. With a slowed economy, there has been an increase in egg donation. More specifically, egg donations have increased by 30 percent at the Center for Egg Options, Ill.

"I was very happy working as an OB-GYN nurse, so it came as a surprise to me that I decided to start The Center for Egg Options Ill.," said Nancy Block, RN, president and founder of the center. "I was at Prentice Women's Hospital for 17 years. I liked the idea of my own business and this was something I felt I could do well while at the same time still use my medical background."

Egg donors are paid \$7,000 and surrogates \$30,000. As the economy worsens, there are increasing numbers of donors to choose from. Couples and singles wishing to start families can now be more picky by choosing donors from a larger selection pool. "An egg donor should be between the ages of 21-29. Donors must be non-smoking, be mentally and physically healthy," Block explained. "Each donor will have a consultation with an attorney who specializes in this field. This is also required for intended parents as well."

The laws regarding alternative conception vary across states, according to Block. "Here in Illinois, we have terrific surrogacy laws. The parentage papers may be filed ahead of time in the courts, but the attorneys and the parents' names are placed on the birth certificate in the hospital. This applies to a married couple even if they use donor egg or donor sperm. In our state you may not use both donor egg and sperm with a gestational surrogate."

All the attorneys that the Center works with are female. In addition, donors consult with a psychologist to ensure not only physical but mental health. Donors should be comfortable understanding that they will help create families for other people.

Kelly, a student from Roosevelt University, was an egg donor. "I learned about egg donation through a college health class and thought it was a great way to help those who are unable to have children." Although the compensation for egg donation is a great incentive to help infertile couples, Kelly maintained the importance of completely understanding alternative conception in its entirety.

"It is a great way to get financially ahead but it is also helping bring a life into a couples' lives, and so I think it needs to be looked at in that way. I say this because I have met some of the ladies during my appointments who are using egg donors and it is a long, stressful and emotional process for them." Kelly explained that being an egg donor requires a lot of commitment. "I missed classes, work and even had to make up some finals to make sure I could make all the mandatory early morning appointments."

Block also confirmed the necessity of being committed to the responsibilities of an egg donor or surrogate. "Commitment is extremely important and we work very hard to make sure all donors are well-informed and will follow through. Donors are also given thousands of dollars in medication to self-administer, so she must be reliable."

The process of egg donation and surrogacy is time-consuming. It involves a regimen of pills and injectable medication that helps stimulate the maturation of eggs. "The first time a donor does this is a little scary but most say it was a lot easier than they thought. Most donors do not have serious side effects from the meds. Most will have temporary bloating prior to and just after the retrieval. This goes away in a few days," Block clarified. This regimen continues until egg retrieval.

"At the egg retrieval, the donor is given an IV and is put to sleep with a quick-acting medication. It actually only takes minutes to complete the retrieval. Donors wake up, drink and go home to take it easy for the rest of the day. Recovery will vary but most do not have problems with pain that persists past a few hours," said Block. According to Block, women can donate up to six times in their lifetime. This is the guideline set by the American Society of Reproductive Medicine.

There are always other factors to consider before following through with becoming an egg donor or surrogate. Future infertility is one of the main concerns of donors. Kelly expressed her own concerns regarding egg donation. "I was worried about my future fertility because I have always had a huge desire to have several children, and since egg donation is a fairly new procedure, there is not that much research done yet on egg donors' future fertility. I did talk to some nurses who assured me that my fertility will not be affected."

Of course, by helping another woman conceive, Block explained that "donors want to make sure that egg donation will not cause infertility. There are no studies linking the two. I can say that no physician will put a donor's health at risk for a voluntary procedure."

Outside of the biological concerns, there is also the necessary support from family and friends. This is important for both donors and intended parents. As a donor, Kelly claimed that she was initially worried about her parents' reaction to her decision. "My family was supportive for the most part but my parents were both concerned about having a 'grandchild' in the world. I understand where they are coming from, but I never looked at it in that way."

Kelly continued by saying that her friends were supportive of her decision and that "some either have donated after me or are in the process of getting started. There were a few that admitted they would not feel comfortable knowing that part of them was out there and that they would be worried that the child would come looking for them one day." This highlights the importance of donors' psychological health and mental readiness.

Block explained that anonymity is common in egg donation. "Donors do not want a teenager knocking on their door as much as intended parents' don't want their child wanting a relationship with their donor. We have to be understanding to the changing needs in this field and how to implement them as well." Opposition to alternative conception is met with Block's sentiment: "The bottom line is these couples and singles want to have a family. For them this is a great option but one that is full of thought as well."