

Altruistic compensation

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DeKALB | Lauren, a Chicago resident, is in the middle of her sixth and last egg donation in the last four years.

For her, the decision to become an egg donor started as a financial one. She had a friend who donated and used the compensation to pay for her college education.

Donors' last names are withheld for anonymity.

Millions of women and couples across the country have difficulty conceiving, according to the National Survey of Family Growth.

Mary Ellen McLaughlin, a partner of Alternative Reproductive Resources, 2000 N. Racine Road, Chicago, said women donate for a combination of reasons. The first is that it is monetarily advantageous since donors typically receive \$7,000 per donation. There is also a large altruistic component.

"There are a lot of people who donate blood or other things and they look at this as another way to help people," McLaughlin said.

As with any medical procedure, there are risks involved with egg donation, but there is probably less than a 1 percent chance of danger, said Nancy Block, director of Center for Egg Options in Northbrook.

Donors are monitored throughout the process so problems can be caught early.

One problem associated with donation is hyper-stimulation, though it is rare, said Joseph Baumgart, obstetrician with Kishwaukee Community Hospital. Hyper-stimulation can cause ovaries to leak large amounts of fluid into the abdominal cavity, instead of the fluid circulating in the blood stream. This can lead to weight gain because of the additional fluid, but the woman will be dehydrated because the fluid is not flowing in the blood. This can cause illness, and, if left untreated, the woman may need to be hospitalized.

Throughout the process, women may suffer PMS-like symptoms and may experience pelvic fullness and bloating. After retrieval of the eggs, it is common for the woman to be sore and cranky, but side effects tend to pass fairly quickly, McLaughlin said.

Despite the minor discomfort of the procedure, Alternative Reproductive Resources completes about 125 to 150 donation cycles per year.

In the end, it all comes down to helping others. After one of Lauren's donations, she received a thank-you letter from someone who received her eggs that she said really touched her.

"It really just puts what we're doing into perspective," Lauren said.