

Half-price IVF offered for eggs

Women in the north of England are being offered half-price fertility treatment if they donate some of their eggs to medical research.

The controversial "egg-sharing" scheme is being run by the Newcastle Fertility Centre and is being funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

It offers women £1,500 towards the costs of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) if they donate half their eggs.

But opponents claim the project would take advantage of vulnerable women.

The MRC is giving the Newcastle University project £150,000.

Public consultation

Priority will be given to couples living in the region between Teesside to the Scottish Borders having treatment at the Newcastle Fertility Centre.

The team at the North East England Stem Cell Institute plan to use them for nuclear re-programming, or therapeutic cloning to make human embryonic stem cells.

Scientists hope research on the cells will revolutionise medicine, helping find new treatments for incurable conditions such as diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

Under pressure

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority agreed in July last year that the practice could proceed - a decision confirmed in January after a public consultation, and now funding has also been approved.

Head of department at the centre, Professor Alison Murdoch, said: "This will ease the financial burden for women who require IVF.

"There is no additional physical risk to the woman as a result of egg sharing.

"Like all UK research, it will be strictly regulated at a local and national level by ethics committees and the principles of research governance."

Josephine Quintaville, from the group Comment on Reproductive Ethics, has already claimed the scheme is "lunacy" and that it will put vulnerable, infertile women under pressure.

Clare Brown, of Infertility Network UK, said "We are concerned that in some cases patients are having to consider egg sharing either for treatment or in this case for research in order to access treatment because they cannot access NHS treatment."

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