

# Women – the silent victims of IVF research

**W**OMEN are the invisible participants in IVF experimentation. It is all too easily forgotten that embryos come from eggs and eggs come from women.

These women are superovulated using hormones such as Clomid, to produce more than the normal one egg per cycle. Women on IVF programs undergo this procedure producing at times between 11 and 15 eggs per attempt.

Doctors repeatedly advise that there are no side effects; but many women have reported unpleasant side effects.

One Geelong woman told me she felt “depressed, spaced out, lethargic and over-emotional” on Clomid, but her gynaecologist said this was an unusual response and she’d probably need hormones during meno-pause!

After six months, she had chronic diarrhoea, nausea, headaches and depression. She had to have an ovarian cyst removed.

One Dutch woman wrote that after a year on Clomid: “I couldn’t see sharply any more. I saw lights and colors and I felt kind of strange/funny

---

**Women have an obvious interest in embryo research, but their views are not always taken into account, says ROBYN ROWLAND**

---

inside my head. I also suffered from a pain in my belly which dragged on and on. Emotionally, I wasn’t stable any more.”

A recent study in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology found that Clomid has a chemical structure almost identical to that of DES (diethylstilboestrol), a drug used from the 1940s to 1971 for pregnant women prone to miscarriage. Some were told it was a vitamin supplement. .

Years later daughters of these mothers suffer cancer of the vagina and cervix at a higher rate than other women their age.

They have a high rate of Infertility - and IVF is now offered as the solution for the mismanagement practised on their mothers. Now, 20 to 40 years later, the mothers suffer 40-50 per cent more breast cancer than other women their age. DES and Clomid may have the same result.

Superovulation also has possible carcinogenic effects. In the Journal of In Vitro Fertilisation and Embryo Transfer, a report on a 25-year-old woman indicated rapidly developing cancer which covered the uterus, bladder, both ovaries and appendix after such treatment. Incessant ovulation may increase the risk of cancer by not allowing the ovaries a rest period, or by creating rapid cell growth which might generalise.

The authors conclude that hormones "can act as promoters in the process of carcinogenesis".

Why do they need embryo experimentation?

In 1985, IVF Australia was set up by Monash University and American entrepreneurs, with the intention of selling both expertise and new techniques to infertile couples and other medicos. They use IVF women as experimental subjects who pay for the privilege, and use the knowledge found to make profits.

But Bob Moses, managing director Of IVFA, recently told a conference of licensing executives that things were not financially good, for the company.

He pointed, put that Monash University is as much an investor as the shareholders (which include the State government), and it too expects a profitable return.

So the Government, Monash University doctors and shareholders in IVFA will profit if researchers can make the "breakthrough" they need in a new technique--currently the micro injection of one sperm into one egg by hand.

They need a breakthrough. They need embryo experimentation, and to do it they need women's eggs. But do women need embryo experimentation?

At a recent seminar called by the Standing Review and Advisory Committee on Infertility supposedly to inform the public on the embryo experimentation debate, women were once again made invisible.

Women in the community who have been concerned over the issue for years, and who have participated in government reviews, were not invited to participate.

Women are the ones facing the risks, and they receive no profit at the end of the game. As Roberta Steinbacher said of the pill: "Who invented it? Who manufactures it. who licensed it, who dispenses it? But who dies from it?"

Dr Robyn Rowland is a social psychologist and senior lecturer in women's studies at Deakin University.