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## Culture may play role in lack of Asian egg donors

BY TOWN TRAVIS  
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Women in Chicago hoping to have an Asian baby through in vitro fertilization may find the road to motherhood longer than they expected. Some local egg donor agencies advertise for donors of Asian heritage, but finding those donors proves to be difficult.

"There is much more demand for Asian donors than there is availability of Asian donors," said Dr. Richard Sherbahn, founder of the Advanced Fertility Center of Chicago. "Our list of available egg donors will generally include many Caucasian and Hispanic women, a few African American women, and sometimes one Asian."

Asian couples, like every other ethnic group, typically seek an ethnic match when considering in vitro fertilization. This makes it even more difficult for a couple to find a donor agency that can provide them with eggs.

"Quite often the Asian couples have a strong preference to use an Asian donor of the same ethnicity as their own," Sherbahn said. "For example, when we had both a Japanese and a Korean woman on our egg donor list we had a Chinese couple that ended up using an egg donor agency in Los Angeles to find a Chinese donor for them."

"We look for donors [by] nationalities," said Mary Fowler, in vitro fertilization coordinator at the Center for Human Reproduction in Oakbrook Terrace. "We don't have as many Asian egg donors, so when they come along we try to grab them as we can. We have a lot of Asian recipients who have been waiting a long time."

"It's not a well-known thing in their community, for Asian people to donate," Fowler said.

Conceive Abilities, a Chicago egg donor agency, advertises on its Web site for Asian egg donors, stating that a high demand exists and such donors may receive higher compensation.

American Society of Reproductive Medicine guidelines recommend that high demand donors be compensated no more than \$10,000. The average egg donor receives approximately \$7,000, paid for by the egg recipient. Not all agencies pay the same, nor do all pay more for Asian donors.

"Because they are such a small part of the intended parent population," said Nazca Fontes, president of Conceive Abilities, "they are just much harder to find and recruit. Culturally speaking, reproductive matters are a very private issue for some."

Most egg donors are young women, many just 21 years old. Although parental consent is not necessary for egg donation, some women may be less inclined to donate without family support.

First-generation Asian immigrants in America may not feel comfortable talking to their parents about egg donation. Fontes said Asian donors might not have the same social support from their families since their parents might not be familiar with reproductive technology.

"A lot of these young women have parents who come from other countries where that kind of technology isn't readily available," Fontes said. "They don't have a knowledge base to even determine if it is something viable for their families."

William Cheung, project coordinator at Asian Health Coalition of Illinois, agreed that how long a woman has lived in the United States makes a difference. "Those who are American born," Cheung said, "are pretty much more Americanized. They are acculturated to the American society."

He said that Asian women who are second- or third-generation born in America would probably be more likely to donate eggs. Cheung added that some Chinese cultures might view egg donation in a negative way and associate it with selling one's body.

Fontes said the sheer numbers of Caucasians who want to donate and receive eggs makes it much easier to meet the demand from Caucasian donors. Asians make up 4.3 percent of Chicago and 3.4 percent in Illinois, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

"People are often surprised that there is such a demand for these donors," Fontes said.

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Egg donor process

Women wishing to donate eggs can typically expect to go through the following process regardless of what agency they choose.

1. Intake interview
2. Q&A session with intake coordinator
3. Anonymous match with recipient
4. Appointment with fertility specialist
5. Tests for infectious disease and a physical exam
6. Meeting with independent attorney to discuss contracts
7. Donation process (10 days to 3 1/2 weeks)
8. Egg retrieval process (approximately two hours)