

Valerie McMorris

Donor Services of NY



By Eleni Sakellis

The first thing most people ask a couple right after their wedding is when they plan to have a baby. For those with fertility issues, it can be a painful question, but there are many solutions couples can explore to fulfill their dream of having a child. Valerie McMorris of Donor Services of NY took time out of her busy schedule to speak with The National Herald about egg donation.

What is the most important thing people should know about Donor Services?

I created Donor Services of NY to offer Intended Parents and Egg Donors compassionate care and individualized attention they may not otherwise receive as they navigate the process of Egg Donor IVF [in vitro fertilization]. I have worked in the area of infertility and IVF for over 16 years. I have worked as an Egg Donor Coordinator within busy, high volume IVF practices, and as an Egg Donor Consultant to help IVF groups create their own egg donor programs, and I have been an egg donor myself.

I want to offer my services for Egg Donors and Intended Parents to help meet their needs with a more personalized touch than they may have with their own IVF clinics. They can work with my services and upon choosing an egg donor they want to cycle with, I will refer the donor to their own IVF doctor for medical testing and cycle for egg donor IVF, so they receive the personalized care I offer, along with the services of the doctor they trust.

I felt that by offering my services as a consultant I could work more closely with both egg donors and intended parents and as such cater a little more to the specific needs of the women. I am their advocate as they cycle and I work closely with their IVF doctor and the IVF clinic where they cycle. I can troubleshoot when needed and sometimes help the process to move along more seamlessly. When needed, I can help both egg donors and intended parents navigate New York City IVF doctor's community and help to find a doctor or practice that appeals most to

them. And I can help educate women about the subject of egg donation and point them to resources that might be helpful to them in their IVF journey.

What is the first thing women considering egg donation should know about the process?

Potential Egg Donors should understand that there is a lot of incorrect information about egg donation both online and as a general topic of conversation with their friends and family.

As complex as the process sounds when discussing it from beginning to end, egg donation is a step by step process that is not complicated once you've walked through it.

As an egg donor (way back when) I felt very little information was given. There was no opportunity to discuss concerns, risks, or procedures, and even the name of the doctors were not given to me. For me, these are examples of what not to do. Egg Donation is a very personal choice and I want to empower women with knowledge to make an educated choice that works best for their own life.

How long does the donation process usually take?

Once an egg donor is matched (usually anonymously) to an intended parent, the process of egg donation takes 6-8 weeks to complete (on average).

Egg donors will undergo an extensive medical work up including: physical examinations, ultrasound of the ovaries and uterus, female hormone panels, infectious disease screens, toxicology, Pap smears and cultures, and an extended genetics work up that takes approximately 3-4 weeks for results to return completed. (For the egg donor, this work up and medications/everything involved will be free of charge).

Usually both the Egg Donor and Intended Parent/ Recipient Mother will cycle in parallel with one another; though they never meet they will take medications at the same time. By the time the egg donor is ready to undergo egg retrieval, the recipient mother will be ready to receive those eggs – which will be fertilized immediately upon egg retrieval.

For the egg donor, the actual cycle of egg donation takes about 12 days (give or take).

How has the process for donors and recipients changed over the years in terms of the technology or other medical breakthroughs?

That is an excellent question! Certainly, as time marches on the medical testing for a cycle of egg donation has become more extensive. The genetics work up has grown tremendously in the past 10 years.

Women who have undergone fertility work ups will generally know their FSH levels (Follicle Stimulating Hormone). The lower FSH levels indicate high quality eggs/active ovaries. Now doctors have determined through extensive research that there is another level that should be tested called AMH or Anti-Mullerian Hormone. Doctors are seeking a good FSH and AMH when looking at potential egg donors and IVF patients. Women with higher AMH levels often stimulate easily and have more quality eggs upon retrieval.

Another significant breakthrough for intended parents is the ability to test an embryo through PGS (preimplantation genetic screening). This means that it can be determined if an embryo carries specific genetic abnormalities that run in a family. It also means that amniocentesis would not be required as genetic analysis



would be complete before the embryo is transferred to the mother. Since Amniocentesis carries risk of infection or even the loss of a pregnancy this is a wonderful breakthrough for intended parents.

Are you seeing an increase in the demand for donors?

No, though in the major cities egg donation is more prevalent than in suburbs or rural areas. Women living in cities often put off having children – perhaps focusing upon career before thinking of starting a family. And for them egg donation may be their unexpected journey toward becoming a parent.

People today are more open about the process, whether or not they discuss this with family members or friends. Going through a fertility issue can be very isolating and finding others who have experienced this same heartache can help tremendously.

Which is more successful, working with an egg donor or using frozen eggs?

Working with an egg donor to create your own embryos is far more successful than using frozen eggs to try to conceive.

With a frozen egg cycle the intended parent would only receive enough eggs for one transfer (maybe 3 eggs). Frozen egg cycles are not cheap – often more than 1/2 of what an egg donation cycle costs but with many fewer eggs, and the success rates are terrible.

Working with an egg donor means the couple would fertilize the eggs at the time of retrieval, when they are fresh and the embryos would develop for several days. The couple would have 1-2 fresh embryos transferred to the recipient mother or gestational carrier and success rates with those fresh transfers are very good.

Plus, intended parents can then cryopreserve (freeze) the remaining embryos. Embryos that are frozen are higher quality than eggs that were frozen before they were fertilized. A couple may have enough embryos to freeze for another two or three transfers (maybe more) – so potentially one could plan for more children in years to come. Working with frozen eggs won't offer that.

Are there any risks or side effects people should be particularly aware of?

Yes, for egg donors there is a risk they need to be aware of called Hyperstimulation Syndrome, but through close monitoring hyperstimulation can be prevented. If the woman appears too sensitive or not at all sensitive to the medication the doctor may change the dose.

Can an egg donor donate more than one time safely? And is there a limit to how many times an egg donor may donate her eggs?

The ASRM (American Society for Reproductive Medicine) has studied egg donation since it has been in existence. Ba-

sed upon their assessment egg donors should limit themselves to no more than 6 cycles of egg donation in a lifetime. Their determination is that by limiting donors to 6 or fewer cycles of egg donation an egg donor will not be at greater risk for things like ovarian, breast, or uterine cancer than they would have naturally from their family history.

Women that have a family history of breast cancer, ovarian cancer or uterine cancers are told by doctors not to donate their eggs. Family history and screening an egg donor will not only inform IVF doctors which woman is better suited to be a good egg donor candidate, but it will also inform doctors which women should not become egg donors in order to maintain their good health.

Will being an egg donor prevent me from having my own child in the future?

No. Egg donation will not change your ability to have children of your own during your fertile years. However, if you put off having children until late in your fertility life you might need to undergo your own cycles of IVF in order to conceive.

Should an egg donor volunteer her own medical insurance as coverage for a cycle of egg donation?

No. Egg donors should never volunteer their own medical insurance information for a cycle of egg donation – especially if she is an anonymous egg donor. With my services and with most IVF clinics in New York City a policy called, "Egg Donor Complication Insurance" will be issued for her cycle of egg donation. Should an egg donor need medical care, due to her cycle of egg donation, the egg donor complication insurance will come into play. Most policies cost the intended parent about \$230 and will cover the egg donor for medical care up to \$150,000.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your work at Donor Services?

The reward I experience is two-fold. I love the baby photos that parents share with me after they have delivered their beautiful babies. Many of the parents that come to me have gone through years of heartache in their fertility journey. The experience of sharing the miracle of the birth of their baby is very gratifying. It's beautiful to play a small part in their success.

Also, I enjoy being able to offer an opportunity for wonderful young women to receive egg donor compensation that may help them pay college tuition, or pay off student loans, or help fund their business projects. This egg donor compensation may help them make their own dreams come true which is a powerful thing. It is a win-win situation for both the egg donor and parent(s) to be. And for the egg donor, it is very rewarding to offer recipient(s) or recipient couples the opportunity to conceive a child.

“ Egg Donation is a very personal choice and I want to empower women with knowledge

”

