

Egg harvesting damages women's health

WASHINGTON - The damage caused by embryonic stem-cell research goes far beyond the embryos destroyed by treating "a great many women as egg factories, at great risk to their health and safety," according to the U.S. bishops' pro-life spokeswoman.

Deirdre A. McQuade, director of planning and information for the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, was commenting on a congressional briefing at which scientists, ethicists and a grieving mother presented evidence about the dangers to women posed by egg harvesting.

McQuade applauded Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., and Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, for co-sponsoring the briefing on "Trading on the Female Body" March 8, International Women's Day.

"The embryonic stem-cell agenda is a threat not only to embryonic humans but to young women as well," McQuade said in a statement.

"The drugs used in in vitro fertilization clinics to stimulate women's ovaries for attempted reproduction have done great harm to some women," she said. "But the problem pales in comparison with the threat posed by attempts to clone humans for embryonic stem-cell research."

In South Korea, for example, where a scientist falsely claimed to have perfected the method for cloning a human, more than 2,200 eggs were used in the experiments, some of them obtained through coercion from women working in the research laboratory.

At least two women - one in London and one in Dublin, Ireland - are believed to have died from the effects of the drugs used to hyperstimulate egg production for in vitro fertilization, known as IVF.

Angela Hickey, the mother of Jacqueline Rushton of Dublin, who died in 2003 at age

32 while undergoing treatment for infertility, addressed the March 8 briefing on Capitol Hill.

“So that her death is not in vain, I would advise all women who are going for IVF to try to have a baby, which Jacqui longed for, or women who wish to donate their eggs, to be very careful and to watch the course of their treatment,” Hickey said.

“They should be informed of the risks and vigilant of their medical care. They need to know how stimulated their ovaries will be and the projected number of eggs retrieved,” Hickey added. “I don’t want any other families to go through what we’re going through.”

Others addressing the briefing included sociologist Diane Beeson of the East Bay campus of California State University; Josephine Quintavalle, director of Comment on Reproductive Ethics in the United Kingdom; and Stuart Newman, professor of cell biology and anatomy at New York Medical College.

McQuade said the briefing was “timely in light of renewed efforts in Congress to fund destructive embryonic stem-cell research in the name of pursuing cures.”

“If a treatment for a major disease ever were to arise from this approach, it would require moving beyond the so-called ‘spare’ embryos frozen in IVF clinics to creating huge numbers of embryos solely for medical research,” she added.

If that were to happen, “minority and impoverished women would be particularly vulnerable to exploitation,” McQuade said.