

Fertility treatment in Poland

ESHRE, the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, fully supports the Polish Gynecological Society and Polish Society for Reproductive Medicine and Embryology in their opposition to legislative changes proposed in the treatment of infertility. As proposed, the changes would in effect reverse legislation introduced by the former coalition government and apply restrictions likely to limit access to fertility treatments in Poland and even jeopardise patient safety.

In 2013 the Polish Ministry of Health introduced a three-year IVF reimbursement programme, which so far has included around 17,000 couples and the birth of 5200 children, a clinical pregnancy rate of 34%, which compares very favourably with that of other European countries. The 2013 bill, which came into force last year, was said at the time by Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz to be a "success of Poland's freedom" and a "chance of happiness" for the couples involved.

Now, however, after parliamentary elections in 2015 and the formation of a new conservative government, the IVF reimbursement programme has already been discontinued and proposals put in place for a new round of restrictive legislation. Among the proposals is a limit of one on the number of eggs which can be fertilised in IVF, and a complete ban on embryo freezing. In ESHRE's opinion, such restrictions would not only deny the people of Poland their family rights as upheld by the World Health Organization and European Union, but would also make fertility treatment with IVF far less successful and less safe than it is now.

Embryo freezing has proved one of the cornerstones of safe IVF and a central reason for its steady increase in success. A ban on embryo freezing will mean a reduction in pregnancies, more treatment cycles to achieve pregnancy, and greater exposure of patients to ovarian stimulation.

If approved, such legislation would consign Poland to its former status, when it stood alone as the only major European country without any statutory support for the treatment of infertility. When similar restrictive legislation was introduced in Italy in 2004, it was rightfully seen as a denial of family rights and challenged - successfully - in the constitutional courts. Indeed, all the restrictive components of Italy's Law 40 have now been dismantled by the Italian courts.

ESHRE expressed its full and continuing commitment to the wide application of safe fertility treatments in Italy, and does so now in Poland. However, ESHRE's commitment is not just to the treatments per se, nor to the doctors who apply them, but is essentially to the couples themselves who need and benefit from those treatments. It is one of the great achievements of modern medicine that almost all types of infertility can now be treated, and there is no good reason why any couple should be denied the benefits of those achievements. ESHRE supports the Polish societies in their efforts to maintain good practice in the treatment of infertility in Poland, and is opposed to any statutory developments which limit both family rights and access to services.

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on behalf of the Executive Committee of ESHRE*