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Sperm, egg donors increase during recession

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By Judy Keen, USA TODAY

CHICAGO — Sperm banks and donor agencies say the recession is prompting a surge in calls from people who hope to make money by donating their sperm or eggs.

"We've seen a definite spike" of about 40% since February, says Kim Springfield, vice president of sales for Health News, an Irvine, Calif., company that operates a national referral service for donors.

Once prospective donors learn that medical and psychological screening can take weeks or months and eliminates most interested men and women, many opt out, Springfield says.

Compensation varies by region, state and donor agency. At Oregon Health & Science University Fertility Consultants in Portland, sperm donors get \$100 per collection and can donate twice a week, says lab director David Battaglia. Egg donors, who undergo an outpatient extraction procedure, can get \$5,000 for a donation, he says.

Egg donors must get mental and physical screening and be selected by prospective parents. Sperm samples are quarantined for six months, Battaglia says. Rules vary, but his agency requires that egg donors be 21-32 years old and sperm donors be between 20 and 39 to improve fertility odds.

Battaglia says his agency has experienced "easily a 25-30% increase in calls in the last nine months."

Sean Tipton, spokesman for the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, says the group tracks donations only on an annual basis and can't say "for sure yet what impact, if any, the economic downturn has had." Still, agencies see a clear trend:

"Our calls have just about doubled," says Robin von Halle, president of Alternative Reproductive Resources in Chicago, which works with egg donors. "It's not a quick buck," she says.

The increase in donors is giving prospective parents more choices, von Halle says, but the economy is forcing some of them to postpone parenthood. In vitro fertilization can cost thousands of dollars.

The Donor Solution in Houston is getting more calls, but many are from women who are too old or too young, says Mary Fusillo, its executive director.

Before the recession, Carol Miller-Woods, donor coordinator at North Hudson IVF in Englewood Cliffs, N.J., got about eight calls a week from potential egg donors. Now she gets that many daily.

She also has gotten calls from at least 100 men inquiring about donating their "eggs."

"Times are that tough, I guess," she says.

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