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OCTOBER 10, 2010

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Worthy of
Western
Pennsylvania

Mom 'grateful' for in vitro

4 million born through controversial means, often last hope for pregnancy

BY **LUIS FABREGAS**
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Amy Doz spent two anxious years trying to get pregnant, taking fertility drugs and undergoing artificial insemination.

As failures mounted and hope faded, Amy and her husband, Matt, turned to the option of last resort, in vitro fertilization.

The procedure worked — twice. The couple had a daughter, Maggie, in 2008 and are expecting another girl in late January.

"We've been through a lot," said Amy Doz, 33, of Adams in Butler County. "Without IVF, I wouldn't have my daughter, and I wouldn't be pregnant again. I'm very grateful for it."

More than three decades after the birth of the world's first "test tube baby," Louise Brown, IVF remains a popular and often controversial option in cases of infertility. The procedure returned to the spotlight last week when Dr. Robert Edwards, the English biologist who developed IVF in 1978, won the Nobel Prize in medicine.

In IVF, specialists fertilize a human egg outside the womb; the resulting embryos are transferred to the uterus.

"There have been remarkable improvements in the success rates of IVF, which make it a more acceptable treatment," said Dr. Carolyn Kubik, who runs Reproductive Health Specialists in Penn Hills, one of three fertility clinics in Western Pennsylvania.

"In some situations, IVF may be the only option for some couples."

About 4 million people have been born with the help of IVF worldwide since Edwards' breakthrough, and today more than 57,000 babies are born every year in the United States as a result of the technology. Nearly 40 percent of IVF procedures in the United States produced a baby in 2007, up from 25 percent in 1999, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The increased success rates are a result of several advances at a time when about 10 percent of couples cannot conceive naturally: better techniques to culture embryos; the ability to safely stimulate multiple eggs without putting the woman's health at risk; the creation of medications to prevent the premature release of eggs; and the development of ultrasonography to monitor embryos as they are placed in the uterus.

"It's probably the best way of achieving a pregnancy in couples that are infertile,"



JASMINE GOLDBAND | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

"Being a mother is the greatest thing. I would do it all over again," Amy Doz said. She and her husband, Matt, of Butler County had daughter Maggie in 2008 and are expecting another girl.

Fertility clinics

Three sites in the region offer in vitro fertilization in addition to other fertility treatments. Figures refer to treatment in 2007 for women younger than 35.

Clinic	Location	Number of cycles of treatment	Percent resulting in live births	Percent resulting in pregnancies
Jones Institute at West Penn Allegheny Health System	Bloomfield	57	35.1	38.6
Reproductive Health Specialists	Penn Hills	78	52.6	64.1
Center for Fertility and Reproductive Endocrinology at Magee-Womens Hospital	Oakland	112	28.6	33.9
National		42,127	39.6	45.7

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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said Dr. Anthony Wakim, director of assisted reproductive technology at Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC.

IVF, which led to the field of stem-cell research, remains controversial because some groups oppose the destruction of unused embryos. In IVF, doctors extract several viable eggs that will be mixed with sperm. Not all resulting embryos are transferred into the uterus, and couples may choose to store or destroy them.

The Roman Catholic Church, the major group opposing IVF, believes that destroying embryos is the equivalent of killing because human life begins at the moment of conception.

"The Catholic Church would not see IVF as an acceptable means for infertile couples," said the Rev. Charles Speicher, pastor of

St. Victor Catholic Church in West Deer and a member of the ethics committee at UPMC Mercy, Uptown. "It essentially separates the conception of the child from the marital act. The understanding of the Catholic Church is that conception comes about as a result of a physical act between the husband and the wife."

At West Penn Hospital's Jones Institute, doctors recommend that couples freeze any remaining embryos for future use, said Dr. Scott W. Kauma, program director.

"If they want another child, they can be thawed," he said.

"They also have the option of donating them or having them destroyed."

Cost remains the biggest obstacle for IVF treatment. Treatments range from \$10,000 to \$15,000, and medications can cost another \$3,000 to \$5,000. While some

couples take out loans, others take advantage of incentive packages. Reproductive Health Specialists offers a cost-sharing option in which couples pay a larger amount if they achieve a pregnancy but get some of their money back if they're not successful.

"It doesn't guarantee a baby," said Kubik, who along with partner Judith Albert performs more than 200 IVF cycles a year. "It's a method of controlling cost."

Amy Doz said she and her husband had to adjust their budget and make sacrifices to pursue a total of six IVF treatments at Reproductive Health Specialists. But the end result is worth it, she said.

"Being a mother is the greatest thing," she said. "I would do it all over again."

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