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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ART register data on delivery rates

Sir,

We read with great interest the compendium of results of the assisted reproductive technology (ART) and intrauterine inseminations in Europe (Nyboe Andersen *et al.*, 2009). We appreciate the difficulties associated with national data monitorization processes and with compilation and analysis of data from several countries which may have utilized different systems, standards and reporting methods. Despite all limitations and obstacles, the members of the European IVF Monitoring (EIM) Programme have managed to prepare a detailed report that gives an overview of the situation across the continent. The authors of the recent report, all whom have invested time and effort into this difficult task, should be commended.

We want to draw attention, however, to one fact which we found to be confusing during appraisal of the data with its current presentation format. The ultimate purpose of ART is the delivery of a healthy infant at term, and the delivery rate is the most relevant outcome parameter that reflects the effectiveness of our practice. We appreciate that a report not including delivery rates will be definitely incomplete and less useful to the reader. This notwithstanding, delivery rates in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Turkey as shown in Tables VI and VII seem to be unrealistic and confusing as presented in the manuscript. Although clinical pregnancy rates per cycle, per aspiration and per transfer for IVF cycles range between 19.2% and 26.4% for Italy, 29.2% and 35.8% for Spain, 19.4% and 24.5% for the Netherlands and 35.2% and 46.8% for Turkey, delivery rates per cycle, per aspiration, per transfer range between 8% and 11%, 9.9% and 12.1%, 9.6% and 12.8% for Italy, Spain and Turkey, respectively, and is reported to be 0% for the Netherlands (meaning that not even a single live birth has been reported for the year 2005). Similarly, the figures for clinical pregnancy rate after ICSI range between 18.6% and 23.9% for Italy, 31.5% and 36.2% for Spain and 34.7% and 37.2% for Turkey. Corresponding delivery rates are less than half of the reported clinical pregnancy rates (8.1–10.4%, 0%, 8.5–9.1% for Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, respectively).

In our opinion, these differences are not biologically plausible, and merely reflect problems in data collection and reporting. One of the reasons for the presence of a large gap between pregnancy and delivery rates as reported by ART centres can be that the majority of women were followed and delivered in hospitals not connected with the ART centres that treated them. We think it would be prudent to omit delivery rates from the report whenever they are incomplete or unreliable. Besides being scientifically sound, this will also prevent unnecessary confusion about the actual delivery rates. Furthermore, access to the data presented by EIM by lay readers and infertile couples may lead to erroneous conclusions regarding success rates of individual clinics and countries.

Reference

Nyboe Andersen A, Goossens V, Bhattacharya S, Ferraretti AP, Kupka MS, de Mouzon J, Nygren KG. Assisted reproductive technology and intrauterine inseminations in Europe, 2005: results generated from European registers by ESHRE: ESHRE. The European IVF Monitoring Programme (EIM), for the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). *Hum Reprod* 2009:**24**:1267–1287.

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