

EDITORIAL

Rules of in vitro fertilization

The termination of a woman's pregnancy in the ninth week because of a suspicion that she may have been implanted with a fertilized egg from another woman at a Kagawa hospital points to incredible sloppiness on the part of the hospital and the doctor in charge. This case should serve as a reminder that the basic guidelines for in vitro fertilization (IVF) must be strictly followed.

The incident at the Kagawa Prefectural Central Hospital surfaced in mid-February after the woman and her husband filed a lawsuit against the hospital demanding ¥20 million in compensation for the psychological pain they suffered.

Surprisingly, patients' names were only written on seals attached to the lids of containers holding fertilized eggs at this hospital. No names were written on the containers themselves.

In violation of the basic rule that prohibits placing containers of fertilized eggs from two or more women on a work table, the doctors had done just that with the two women's eggs. On Sept. 18, the doctor threw away the lid of one of the containers of the second woman's fertilized eggs, thinking that the egg was unnecessary. He then worked with containers of the first woman's fertilized eggs on the same worktable and became unable to tell which eggs belonged to which woman.

Eventually, the doctor implanted three fertilized eggs in the first woman. This move in itself violated the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology's ethics code, which prohibits implanting more than one fertilized egg.

Since the resulting embryo developed much faster than expected, the doctor began to suspect around Oct. 16 that the egg may have come from the second woman. On Nov. 11, the pregnancy was aborted after the hospital gained consent from the woman and her husband. The hospital did not take additional steps to ascertain the origin of the egg.

Japan's first test-tube baby was born in 1983. Now one out of every 60 newborn babies is conceived in this manner. It is imperative that hospitals strictly follow the rules governing IVF procedures.

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