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See ya later, incubator

Clinic tests low-tech fertility method

By Jim Ritter
CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

A local fertility clinic is testing a surprisingly low-tech technique in women undergoing in vitro fertilization.

The usual method is to grow embryos in a temperature-controlled incubator for a few days. In the new technique, eggs are fertilized in a 2-inch plastic capsule, which is placed in the woman's vagina.

After three days, the capsule is removed, and one or more embryos are implanted in the woman's uterus.

The capsule technique eliminates the hassle and expense of incubators. There also are important psychological benefits, said Veronica Jordan, chief executive officer of Medelle Corp., which makes the device.

"Having fertilization occur in their body is a motivating factor for women," Jordan said. "They feel more involved and more connected with the procedure."

Medelle is funding a clinical trial of the capsule at several fertility centers, including IVF 1 in Chicago and Naperville.

The capsule technique was developed in the 1980s. Studies published in the 1990s found that pregnancy rates were comparable to traditional IVF techniques. But there were technical difficulties with the capsule, and the technique didn't catch on.

Jordan said Medelle has developed a capsule that does not have the technical problems of the old device. The new capsule is called INVOcell.

CLINICAL TRIAL

The INVOcell is being tested in a clinical trial at several fertility centers, including IVF 1 in Chicago and Naperville. The study will include infertile women under age 35 whose mates have normal sperm counts. Participants will receive free in vitro fertilization, which normally costs about \$12,000. Visit www.ivf1.com or call (630) 357-6540.



Chicago Sun-Times photos

Dr. Randy Morris holds an intravaginal capsule next to an incubator. Instead of incubating a fertilized egg in the conventional machine, a capsule with a fertilized egg inside can be placed inside a woman's vagina until the egg becomes an embryo.