

# Sergio Cereceda Stone

Sergio Cereceda Stone was born 16 April 1942 in the coastal city of Valparaiso, Chile. Stone's mother Luz was a housewife and caretaker for Sergio and his younger brother Lionel; his father Sergio served among the country's twenty appellate court judges. In the early 1950s Stone's father relocated the family to Santiago to further his law career. There Stone attended the Jesuit elementary and high school Collegio San Ignatius, finished in the top ten percent of his class, and met José Balmaceda, his future coworker at the Center for Reproductive Health in Irvine, California. From San Ignatius, Stone went on to the University of Chile Medical School where he finished his obstetrics and gynecology residency. In 1969 he accepted a grant from the Ford Foundation for advanced research in endocrinology.

Stone conducted research and practiced medicine in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California until he obtained a faculty position at the Louisiana State University Medical School in New Orleans. He also worked at Charity Hospital, a public teaching hospital, until 1978 when he and his wife Angelica moved back to California. There Stone joined the faculty of the University of California Irvine Medical Center and the couple continued raising their three children. In 1990 Stone joined a partnership with Ricardo Asch and his former schoolmate José Balmaceda and worked with them in the fertility clinics of the Center for Reproductive Health. Stone's specialties within the Center were uterine surgery and hormonal treatments to induce ovulation in women undergoing fertility treatments.

In 1991 allegations of a scandal arose when evidence surfaced of egg and embryo transfers performed within the Center without patient consent. All three doctors were accused, yet Stone denied having performed any egg or embryo transfers without consent as his job focused on earlier aspects of fertility procedures. The homes of Stone, Asch, and Balmaceda were searched on 19 September 1995 in hope of finding logs or documents pertaining to the stolen eggs. The next month, Asch escaped the country to Mexico City and Balmaceda fled to Chile, leaving Stone to face the charges alone. Since Stone was the only one of the three partners remaining in the United States, he was civilly liable for all outstanding debts and fines against the Center and the only accessible suspect to suffer any legal consequences.

Stone was arrested 25 April 1996 and tried in the federal courthouse in Santa Ana, California, in September 2007. He was accused of mail fraud for insurance billing and of attempted tax evasion. After deliberating four days, the jury found Stone guilty of mail fraud but innocent of tax evasion. He was fined \$71,000, punished with one year of home probation, three years regular probation, and revocation of his medical license for the duration of his probation. Although he continued to receive his faculty salary while on leave, he was barred from entering the university grounds and thus from attending his son's medical school graduation. Despite disagreement from the faculty committee and the administrative law judge, the chancellor fired Stone. In March of 2000 he became the first tenured professor to be fired in the thirty-five year history of the university. The University of California Regents terminated Stone for reasons of false insurance billing, concealing income, failing to get proper approval for research, and refusing to adequately cooperate with university investigations.

Stone's partners at the Center for Reproductive Health have so far evaded consequences by refusing to return to the United States. Stone is considered removed from the egg and embryo scandal, yet his involvement in the Center and his collaboration with partners Asch and Balmaceda implicate him in misconduct at the Center. None of the doctors have been proven guilty of committing egg theft or transfers without consent, but the allegations have wrought headlines and television exposés

worldwide that tarnished their impressive medical reputations.

## **Sources**

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3. National News Brief. "Fertility Clinic Scandal Costs Professor His Job." *New York Times*, March 17, 2000. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9903E5DE143AF934A25750C0A9669C8B63&scp=1&sq=sergio+stone&st=nyt> (Accessed April 01, 2008).