

National Embryo Donation Center

The National Embryo Donation Center (NEDC) is a non-profit organization that was established in 2002 in Knoxville, Tennessee. The organization is endorsed and supported by several Christian-based associations such as the Christian Medical Association, Bethany Christian Services, and Baptist Health Systems. Its goal is to provide embryo donation and embryo adoption services in order to utilize the large number of embryos that are being cryopreserved as a result of infertility procedures and are no longer needed. Jeffrey Keenan, Medical Director of the NEDC, is an OB/GYN, reproductive endocrinologist, and infertility specialist.

The NEDC is associated with the Southeastern Fertility Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. Development of the NEDC was planned to encompass the ideals of traditional adoption and the medical knowledge of infertility. The beliefs of the NEDC are that every embryo should have the opportunity or chance of life.

The organization also educates the public about the options of embryo donation and adoption. In order to accomplish this goal, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has provided federal grant money to NEDC. A portion of the equipment and technology that is used at the center is received through donations. The hope of the entire center is to make embryo donation and adoption well-known options both to individuals deciding what to do with their excess embryos that are cryopreserved, and to those still struggling with fertility issues.

Several people from different backgrounds comprise the team at the NEDC. The staff positions are embryologist, grant manager, PR and marketing manager, researcher, research assistant/librarian, patient coordinator, and administrative assistant. The medical director and name most often linked to this organization is Jeffrey Keenan. There is also a board of directors that ensures the NEDC follows and is up to date with all legal, medical, and social issues.

The NEDC website (www.embryodonation.org) explains embryo donation and adoption in detail while providing a variety of information to potential donors or adopters. The application form to apply to the NEDC program is also available on-line along with the release of medical information, informed consent, and relinquishment forms. These files are available through the website so they can be printed and taken to a clinic in order to proceed with the process of embryo donation or embryo adoption.

The donated embryos that the organization receives are unused embryos that have been cryopreserved in fertility clinics. The NEDC allows individuals who donate their excess embryos to choose from various levels of contact with the prospective adopting couple, ranging from anonymous to completely open, meaning full communication. The organization also permits donors to specify the characteristics they prefer in an individual(s) receiving their donated embryo(s). Lastly, donors must undergo medical screening and a series of genetic tests before being cleared as eligible to donate through the program. There are also requirements that the individual receiving the embryo must meet. For example, the woman receiving the embryo must be married. Home reviews, background screening, and counseling are all part of the embryo adoption process.

The public has become more aware of embryo adoption since the Bush administration made statements supporting the practice. Former President George W. Bush specifically spoke about the Snowflakes program, which is a part of Nightlight Christian Adoptions (NCA). This organization played a major role in motivating the creation of NEDC. Although both the NEDC and Snowflakes both support and provide the service of embryo adoption, their approaches to the process differ in some ways. For example, the NEDC allows the donation and adoption process to be either anony-

mous or open while the NCA requires at least some form of communication between donor(s) and adopter(s).

Embryo donation and adoption programs like NEDC aid in the success rate of the match process involved in embryo adoption. The NEDC has set up a research program, chaired by Dr. Reg Finger, in order to gain more knowledge and insight on embryo donation and adoption. In order for these resources to be available to the public, the NEDC has created a website (www.embryoconnection.org) for this purpose. The center is still only in its beginning stages, but the NEDC hopes that the number of embryo transfers will grow as individuals become increasingly aware of this option.

Sources

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