

## Bob Edwards Nobel prize award, 10 December 2010

### Comments from the International Federation of Fertility Societies

#### For immediate release, 9 December 2010

The International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) congratulates Professor Robert Edwards on his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine which he receives in Stockholm, Sweden on Friday, December 10, 2010.

Professor Edwards is the embryologist who performed the basic science and laboratory work, along with Dr. Patrick Steptoe who provided clinical care, which resulted in the birth of the world's first in vitro fertilization (IVF) baby, Louise Brown, on July 25, 1978. Since that time IVF has become the most successful treatment for infertility. It is now available in over 100 countries, has delivery rates for each single attempt that average about 25% globally and more than twice as high in selected good prognosis patients. In Denmark and some other countries almost 5% of babies are born as a result of IVF and over 4 million babies have been born globally from IVF.

Speaking for the IFFS, Professor David Adamson (Palo Alto, California, [gdadamson@arcfertility.com](mailto:gdadamson@arcfertility.com)) said:

*“Despite its current wide and significant success, IVF pioneer Bob Edwards struggled for years against much scientific and social opposition so that he could bring IVF to fruition. Furthermore, IVF is still today not covered by many insurance plans because of misperceptions about infertility and lack of recognition that it is a disease that affects 9% of all reproductive age women. Importantly, male partners have sperm problems that contribute to the infertility in approximately 50% of couples.*

*The IFFS congratulates our colleague and friend, Dr. Bob Edwards, and thanks him for his major contribution to humanity--past, present and future”.*

IFFS President, Dr David Healy (Monash, Australia, [david.healy@monash.edu](mailto:david.healy@monash.edu)) said:

*“We congratulate Bob Edwards, the prize is richly deserved. The World Health Organisation recognizes that infertility is a disease, and like any other disease, it needs to be treated. Edwards and Steptoe were the pioneers who began to make this possible”.*

IFFS Treasurer, Dr Edgar Mocanu (Dublin, [emocanu@rcsi.ie](mailto:emocanu@rcsi.ie)) added:

*"Since the historic first IVF conception, which we celebrate on Friday with Bob Edward's Nobel prize, ART techniques have been recognised as safe medical practice. There have been more than 4 million children born worldwide after assisted conception. In that time, Health Departments have given little political recognition to the issue of male and female infertility, and this is pretty well true throughout the western world. The irony is that many of these same countries have seen a significant decline in birth rates to the level it has*

*become a political issue. Edwards and Steptoe met with resistance to their work, but now potential parents are meeting short term thinking.*

*Infertility is a disease, like any other. Many countries do not provide public purse financial support for IVF treatments, thus depriving couples of the right to medical treatment for this disease.*

*The IFFS believes that time has come for governments to take responsibility and provide couples the financial support to undertake assisted reproduction; this will ultimately benefit the whole society, especially in the many countries where not enough children are been born to sustain the population”.*

Specific IVF technologies that have changed the face of medicine include intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) to treat male factor infertility, cryopreservation of sperm, eggs and embryos to allow optimal results from IVF and to help cancer patients have babies after their treatment, and preimplantation genetic diagnosis to prevent major genetic diseases. Much scientific research is now directed towards assessing the quality of embryos so that live birth rates can be increased while multiple birth rates are decreased.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes**

IFFS is the world's largest international society of fertility societies. The IFFS organizes the World Congress of Fertility and Sterility, which takes place every 3 years; the next congress will be in Boston in 2013, jointly with the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. In addition every 3 years it publishes the IFFS Surveillance which documents the regulatory and societal status of IVF globally.

For more information, please contact the IFFS press officer, Tom Parkhill, [tom@parkhill.it](mailto:tom@parkhill.it), tel +44 7509 215 465.

See also the IFFS website, <http://www.iffs-reproduction.org>