

## **GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION FOR DCN IN PARLIAMENT**

### **Debates on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill**

**21 January 2008**

#### **Baroness Royall (Government Minister)**

The noble Earl raised the issue of the need for parents to be open about the true conception of the children and for information to be provided in a sensitive way. Clearly that must be dealt with in counselling, although there are organisations such as the Donor Conception Network which work with potential parents of donor-conceived children to help and encourage them to tell their children about their origins, and to tell them the best means of going about this. Things are being done.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, we are currently having discussions with the Donor Conception Network—an organisation of families of donor-conceived children and donor-conceived adults—about ways in which current and potential parents of donor-conceived children can be encouraged to tell the children about their origins. Workshops and materials are being planned. The aim is to encourage openness, and the Donor Conception Network provides information on telling and talking. It also provides helpful advice on how to tell older children, precisely to

ensure that the cases of anger described by the noble Earl, Lord Howe, and the noble Lord, Lord Jenkin, do not arise.

**Baroness Barker (Lib Dem)**

I wish to flag up two matters, one of which is the work of the Donor Conception Network. I have been involved in it, I have seen some of its work, and I invite noble Lords to take the easy action of clicking on to its website. There they will find not only guidance to prospective parents but guidance from existing donor fathers, donor mothers and same-sex couples about the importance of telling children at an early stage about their status and about all other aspects of the experience that they are likely to have and the things that they should consider as parents. So, even without the legislation, much work is already being done.

We should do two things: we should encourage the Government to continue to support all voluntary efforts such as the talking and telling courses that are being implemented by the Donor Conception Network for parents; and we should be mindful that counselling is a resource, and it costs.

**28 January 2008**

**Baroness Royall (Government Minister)**

The Government recognise the importance of ensuring that prospective parents understand how important it is that a child is told that they were donor-conceived. As the noble Baroness, Lady Finlay, said, honesty is fundamental, and a child who is told at an early age will grow up with that knowledge and will be better informed, and there will be better family relationships. That is done by the parents

telling them in the most effective and least distressing way. It is the Government's view that that is best achieved by education rather than enforcement.

To that end, the Department of Health is working closely with the Donor Conception Network to support projects to encourage telling. Like the noble Baroness, Lady Barker, I certainly recommend that your Lordships have a look at its website, which is rather good. We are funding the Telling and Talking project, which supports parents who have already told children about their donor conception. We are also funding a second project that will be working with prospective parents hoping to conceive using donor gametes. These projects, involving discussions and workshops, will be piloted and evaluated to assess the best way of communicating with parents and prospective parents and to give them the opportunity to feed back information. The preparation project will talk to parents about the process of donor conception, its implications and its particular responsibilities.

4<sup>th</sup> February: Third Reading

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon:** My Lords, these are indeed complex issues. There has been considerable debate during the passage of the Bill on the issue of recording the fact of donor conception on birth certificates. As I said during Report, the Government fully recognise the importance of donor-conceived children being aware of their origins and we have a policy of openness in that area. We are taking a number of steps in this respect.

The Department of Health is working closely with the Donor

Conception Network to support projects □□ **4 Feb 2008 : Column 904** □□ to encourage telling donor-conceived children about the details of their conception. We are funding the “Telling and Talking” project, which supports parents who have donor-conceived children to tell them about their conception. We are also funding a second project, which will be working with prospective parents hoping to conceive using donor gametes. The House earlier accepted an amendment that will require a licence condition to be placed on clinics to ensure that people being treated with donor gametes or embryos are provided with information about the importance of telling their child from an early age that they were donor conceived.

However, I fully recognise the point the noble Lord, Lord Jenkin, makes about the need to review the position on the birth certificates of donor-conceived people. It is clear that many noble Lords have given a lot of thought to the needs of donor-conceived people, the importance of knowledge about their genetic history, and the implications of annotating birth certificates in some way. We need to keep in mind the options and consider how people’s views on those options may change. Assessing the impact of the Donor Conception Network’s projects to educate patients and parents about the need to tell will play a part in that.

I can make a firm commitment that the Government will carry out a review of practices in informing donor-conceived children of the fact of their donor conception and whether there is a need for a change in the law to best ensure that donor-conceived children are informed of their donor conception. We will do this within the timeframe suggested by the amendment tabled by the noble Lord, Lord Jenkin.