

Spine-damaged man to become a father

The first reported pregnancy in the United States using sperm obtained by electrical stimulation was announced at the University of Michigan Medical Center.

Known as electroejaculation, the procedure uses a rectal probe to induce ejaculation with a low-voltage

impulse. It was successfully used in a man who had been unable to father a child because of spinal injury.

"The majority of men who suffer spinal injury, and virtually all men who have undergone corrective surgery for testicular cancer, become infertile because they can no longer

ejaculate," said Dr. Carol J. Bennett, an instructor in the U-M Medical Center's urology division.

"But with the development of electroejaculation, we no longer have to assume that these men must give up their hopes of fathering children."

THE PROJECT is funded by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans of America Association, which has provided approximately \$70,000 over the last two years.

Researchers say that the technique offers new hope to thousands of neurologically impaired men who wish to father children. Dr. Bennett led the team, which developed the technique for use in humans.

Bennett's patient is a 37-year-old man who has requested anonymity. He became a paraplegic from a spinal cord injury four years ago. Since then, he has been infertile.

However at the U-M Medical Center, his wife recently was successfully impregnated by artificial insemination using sperm obtained from her husband with electroejaculation, Bennett reported.

The technique artificially produces the impulse that would normally be transmitted by the brain to cause ejaculation, but which is interrupted

in men with spinal injuries or impairments from surgery for cancer.

"DRUGS HAVE worked to restore the ability to ejaculate for some patients who have undergone surgery for testicular cancer," Bennett said. "And with a few, the ability to ejaculate returns by itself in time. But most of these patients remain infertile."

Bennett said the electroejaculation has potential to help many of the 8,000 men who suffer spinal cord injuries each year in the United States. The vast majority of these men who suffer such injuries — about 6,000 — are between the ages of 15 and 29 years, the principal years of fatherhood.

Bennett's team is studying the technique in 26 patients, 24 of whom became infertile after suffering a spinal injury. One patient is infertile because of removal of lymph nodes to treat testicular cancer, and the other has multiple sclerosis.

"While those who undergo surgery have the option to freeze sperm beforehand, our technique gives another alternative," Bennett said.

"ELECTROEJACULATION also appears to be superior to vibromassage, a previously used technique that stimulates the penis with a vi-

brator, in obtaining sperm. Electroejaculation produces a higher ejaculation rate and has less effect on blood pressure," she said.

U-M researchers adapted electroejaculation for humans from a technique that has been successfully used in animals.

Dr. Stephen W.J. Seager, professor of veterinary medicine at Texas A&M University and a leading researcher in the use of the technique with wild animals, is working closely with U-M scientists on the project.

Seager has used the technique for breeding animals in 2005 and to help propagate endangered species such as wolves and pandas.

Electroejaculation was used to produce an erection in dogs in 1963, Bennett said. In 1922, it was used in experiments to obtain sperm from guinea pigs, and in 1966, an electri-

cal probe was used to obtain sperm from a cat.

"THIS TECHNIQUE," Bennett said, "remains a mainstay in animal husbandry for collecting semen from cattle and other farm animals for analysis and artificial insemination."

Other investigators on the study include Dr. Edward J. McGuire, head of the section of urology at the U-M Medical Center, and Dr. Jonathan W.T. Ayers, director of the U-M Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility Division of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Seager and McGuire have used this technique in experiments with monkeys and that research eventually led to the current U-M study with humans.

'Silent Observer' ignored — chamber

Use of the "Silent Observer" reward program has declined during the past year, the Oakland County Chamber of Commerce said last week.

Police in Pontiac and Waterford Township, along with the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, are using the program, but others have let it slip, the Pontiac-based chamber said.

Bill Kirkland, of the chamber's crime prevention committee, said the program has paid out \$75,000 in rewards and helped solve more than 200 major crimes to date. He gave a briefing on the program to 50 police chiefs and law enforcement officials last week.

"Effective this year, all rewards have been doubled," Kirkland said. "Up to a \$2,000 reward is offered for information leading to arrest and

conviction for murder and up to \$1,000 for tips about other felonies committed in Oakland County."

Under the Silent Observer program, tipsters can remain anonymous.

Nearly half the 206 rewards were paid out in Pontiac cases — a total of 96. Waterford Township was second with 35 rewards.

Here is a rundown on how often area communities have used the Silent Observer program:

- Bloomfield Township — 18.
- Farmington — one.
- Oakland University — one.
- Oakland County prosecutor — two.
- Oakland County Sheriff — 24.
- Rochester — three.
- Troy — one.
- West Bloomfield — two.

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