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Hundreds of Irish women flock to Spanish fertility clinic

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Byline: Lynne Kelleher

IRISH women have been flocking to Spain over the past three years in an attempt to have babies with fertile eggs donated by young Europeans.

Advanced fertility techniques in the Instituto Marques in Barcelona give women the possibility of carrying a baby even after going through menopause, with the stipulation that they are under the age of 50.

As a result of liberal Spanish laws, childless couples, same-sex couples and single women have flown to the Barcelona fertility clinic to obtain eggs, sperm and embryos that have been donated. Last year, 100 Irish couples and single women were treated, with 70 treated in 2008 and 50 in 2007.

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So far this year, some 42 have been treated at the clinic.

While laws in Spain ensure that the donation of eggs, sperm and embryos is anonymous, there is no legislation in Ireland to cover assisted reproduction treatments - despite recommendations drawn up five years ago by the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction. Dr Victoria Walker from the specialised clinic in Barcelona has seen Irish patients double in the past three years because of the protection of the law in Spain.

She said: 'Irish people come here because they are seeking anonymity and ease of access and a non-judgmental opinion.

'We take whoever comes and try to help them. We can offer egg donation, sperm donation, embryo donation and specialist genetic analysis of embryos before they are put back.'
Legislation passed by the Spanish parliament in recent years guarantees donor anonymity and allows women who donate eggs to be paid a compensation fee for giving up their time. The clinic is supplied with fresh eggs every week from between 15 and 20 healthy European women between the age of 18 to 35.

Dr Walker said that the women who donate the eggs undergo thorough screening procedures for any genetic illnesses.

She explained: 'We screen the donors and check through their own histories and pay particular attention to their medical histories and their families' medical histories.' The cost of a cycle of egg donation in the clinic is e10,000, with frozen eggs or embryos costing around e2,500.

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