



Position Statement – Storage and Disposal of Embryos

flindersfertility Position

flindersfertility provides embryo storage for 5 years with the option to renew consent for a further 5 years.

Ethical issues of embryo storage and disposal

There are many complex ethical and emotive issues associated with embryo storage, embryo donation and allowing embryos to succumb. As an example, many people express different views as to when human life begins. For some, life begins at conception, for others it is at the time of implantation, or at the time of fetal brain development. Some people hold the view that human life begins at birth, reflecting the perspective that legal rights begin at the birth of a child. These diverse views and the experiences and outcomes of their fertility treatment will impact on how participants approach end of storage decision-making.¹

Ethical Guidelines - Compliance

Separate to the ethical issues expressed above, bodies offering assisted reproductive procedures in Australia must be accredited by the Fertility Society of Australia, which requires compliance with the *National Health and Medical Research Council, Ethical Guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology in clinical practice and research (2007)* (“NHMRC Ethical Guidelines”) as part of their accreditation process.

flindersfertility complies with the NHMRC Ethical Guidelines.

The NHMRC Ethical Guidelines deal with the issue of embryo storage and disposal.

Ethical Guidelines – Section 8

Section 8 of the NHMRC Ethical Guidelines states:

8.8 *Limit duration of storage*

It is not desirable to leave embryos in storage indefinitely.

Clinics must have clear policies that limit the duration of storage of embryos.

8.8.1 *The maximum time for which embryos may be kept in storage should be five years with the option to renew consent for a further five years.*

8.8.2 *If, after the maximum period of storage, the embryos have not been used, donated or allowed for use in research (see paragraph 8.5), and no alternative arrangements have been made by the persons for whom the embryos are stored, clinics should arrange for the disposal of the embryos.*

8.9 *Dispose of embryos respectfully*

Clinics must have protocols in place for the respectful disposal of embryos.

8.9.1 *The wishes of the persons for whom the embryos are stored, as to the method of disposal, should be respected.*

There is no provision for extension of the 10 year limit under South Australian law.

Reasons for 5+5 storage

There are a number of reasons put forward in literature as to why embryos are only allowed to be stored for a maximum of 10 years. They include:

1. To prevent the endless, expensive storage of abandoned embryos².
2. To prevent embryos from being held in storage after contact is lost with the genetic parents³. The view is that it is exceedingly difficult to locate most of the couples concerned and obtain up to date instructions about what to do with their embryos.

¹ Reproductive Technology Council of Western Australia, Policy On Embryo Storage And Applications To Extend Storage Beyond Ten Years, Reproductive Technology Council, February 2010, 3.

² Notebook/Talk of the Streets, London: Embryo Ethics, TIME INT’L, Aug. 5, 1996, at 6

³ The storage of human embryos, Karin J.Dawson, IVF Unit, Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Royal, Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital, Du Cane Road, London W12 0NN, UK, Human Reproduction vol.12 no.1 pp.3–11, 1997

3. To avoid the creation of a growing bank of frozen embryos⁴.
4. To avoid the possibility of “embryo banking” which may occur, where embryos remain in storage for extended periods of time and ultimately are not required for use in treatment

Options for when the 10 year limit is near

1. You can use the embryos for your own treatment.
2. You may give consent to have the embryos removed from storage and allowed to succumb.
3. You may give consent for them to be donated for the use of infertility treatment of others.
4. You may give consent for the embryos to be donated for research. The National Health and Medical Research Council’s Embryo Research Licensing Committee, under a nationally consistent legislative scheme, licenses these uses.

⁴ Saunders DM, Bowman MC, Grierson A, Garner F. Frozen embryos: too cold to touch? The dilemma ten years on. Hum Reprod 1995; 10: 3081-3085.