

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

Thursday 9 June 2022

Donor-Conceived People – Eleni

Start

This is the final story in my series on donor-conceived people. This is Eleni's story, and these are her words:

I was conceived in November 1988 via sperm donation in Canberra, and born 1989. I have known about my donor conception my whole life. I have no memory of 'being told' so I could build my identity around it. My parents spoke very openly and honestly about it but had no information for me except speculation.

I left Canberra for 15 years as an adult for many reasons, but I felt a positive side effect would be reducing the risk of unknowingly starting any kind of relationship with a half-sibling.

My understanding from my parents and the doctor is that my conception happened in consulting rooms, outside of an official clinic. My parents understanding was it was a direct agreement between the three (the doctor, the donor, and my parents) parties for an anonymous sperm donation.

Apparently (confidentiality/privacy) forms were signed but no records remain with any party.

My parent's psychological situation is important here in regard to a medical duty of care. Four years prior my birth, my 13-year-old brother drowned, a traumatic experience and a massive loss for the whole family.

After a failed vasectomy reversal, my father could not be my biological father. I don't know how my mother was counselled on making this decision on what the best format would be going forward. It's important to recognise the impact of her situation on the decisions she made; her trauma and loss, her age and the time pressures that presented, and how a lack of regulation and appropriate child-centred counselling played into her decision-making. She chose donor anonymity, received no information about the donor or my future rights.

I wasn't curious about sperm donor information until I started thinking about having my own children, and how my lack of DNA knowledge may affect them.

So, in my mid-20s I contacted the Doctor by letter asking what my rights were and what processes were in place. I was informed over the phone that as a private agreement no details would have been taken, and even if there were records, they would have been destroyed after seven years - so I would have had to make that decision by the age of 6 years old.

I was offered a meeting with the doctor at-cost to be told this information in person, but I was told I would be told the same information. I was shocked I would be charged hundreds of dollars for 10 minutes and decided not to go through this process.

This forced me to turn to DNA testing which wasn't my preferred method as I actually just wanted medical information and a knowledge of how many half-siblings, cousins etc I would have and what last names to be wary of.

Ultimately, I had to pay a genetic genealogist to make sense of my DNA, and now I have identified the sibling group the donor came from and made initial contact with the family.

I also consulted a lawyer to understand my rights and was shocked to learn there was nothing in the law that allowed for any support for me, my donor, my parents or the donors family. I was on my own. There was no requirement for any basic information such as number of siblings, cultural and medical history to be kept on file for a decent period of time in the ACT.

The costs of pursuing information with the doctor and lawyers was prohibitive and unlikely to deliver me anything except a painful experience. Of all the difficulties being a donor-conceived person creates, the treatment by the fertility industry has been the worst.

After making contact with the family, I learnt all the vague statements the doctor had supplied about my donor's situation were to be untrue. I uncovered important medical and cultural information that my parents had no access to.

The lack of records also means my donor's family can't get to the truth around what happened, as there is a very serious concern that my donor was exploited unknowingly that I cannot set straight either way without these records.

That is Eleni's story, and it is stories like Gail's, Kirrily's, and Eleni's, and many others that I've heard thanks to Donor Conceived Australia that I will continue to see reform in the ACT and to see the rights of the child front and centre of legislative reform.

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