

State and Local

Researchers study causes of low sperm count

By Anita Arnold
Reporter

More couples are waiting until later in life to have children only to discover that the chances of conceiving those children decrease as they grow older.

In many cases, a reduction in sperm count among older men was considered the problem. This prompted a study by Texas A&M researchers to look at processes in the testes that could be the cause of the decrease.

He said the goal of the study was to figure out what changes occur in the testes and in hormone levels to account for the fact that older men produce fewer sperm than younger men.

"One of the most important findings was that the numbers of Sertoli cells, which are the support cells in the testes, were reduced at the same rate as sperm production rates in a man as he grows older," Dr. Larry Johnson, associate professor of veterinary anatomy, said. "Maybe our emphasis should be placed on maintaining the Sertoli

cells rather than studying the germ cells." Johnson said this study has been ongoing for the past 10 years, but has received funding from the National Institute of Health for only six of those years.

The greatest changes in sperm production occur after the age of 60, but the first changes have been found to happen between the ages of 40 and 50.

"Certainly not many people want to have kids whenever they are that old," Johnson said. "However, it is possible because the

oldest case of paternity is recorded at the age of 94."

Today's trends show that couples are having children later in life and, especially in cases of remarriage, older men have the opportunity to father a child.

Statistics from the U.S. Public Health Service show that from 1975 through 1983 the birth rate among women ages 30-34 increased 24 percent.

The study does not involve insemination or conception, but it concentrated on changes in spermatogenesis related to age.

With advancing age, the level of testosterone decreases in the blood stream, and the amount of luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone are elevated because older men have a less functional testicular region, he said.

"The same percentage of degeneration occurs in young and old men at a certain point during meiotic divisions of spermatogenesis (the process of sperm production)," Johnson said. "The only difference is the young men produce sperm in higher numbers."

Examiner not indicted by grand jury

HOUSTON (AP) — Harris County grand jurors decided not to indict Medical Examiner Joseph Jachimczyk for accepting fees for autopsies on organ transplant donors.

The panel, however, did recommend that Commissioners Court review Jachimczyk's salary and outside income, that the state's inquest law be followed and that medical examiner officials view organs before transplants.

The jury's decision Wednesday was influenced by the fact that what initially was viewed as abuses has been curtailed in recent weeks, prosecutor Don Stricklin said.

Under Texas law, medical examiners or their personnel must examine organs of prospective donors who die in hospitals because of injury or traumatic accidents.

An anonymous source started the investigation by sending prosecutors a copy of a Gulf Coast Organ Procurement Center letter naming 15 people on whom Jachimczyk had done autopsies for \$1,000 each.

Stricklin said it was found that the \$110,000-a-year medical examiner would have to have examined many of the people as part of his regular work.

The probe widened when it was learned that, contrary to state law, medical examiner officials had not been viewing bodies and conducting formal inquests into causes of death before removing organs for transplants, relying instead on hospital physicians' opinions.

Computer system helps monitor bovine behavior

By Marc Weisinger
Reporter

Although a talking cow is probably out of the question, communication between people and cows is becoming a reality after years of research and with the help of computers.

The research, done by Dr. J.W. Stuth and Dr. Steve Searcy, along with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, has resulted in the development of a datalogger computer system, known as the PDL 2, which allows cattle to relay important information about their walking, resting time and the amount of food they eat.

"We had problems in our early research because of the length of time it took to gather our data," Stuth said. "We realized the use of a digital computer would be faster than an analog computer, so we changed."

Weighing less than a pound, the PDL 2 is the size of a small notebook and is strapped to the cow's front shoulder. The datalogger is connected to sensors that monitor biting, stepping and chewing, Stuth said.

The main purpose of the research is the feeding sta-

tion behavior, he said. These observations of behavior will show how fast cows chew, how long they spend searching for food and how much time they allocate to find their next feeding spot.

"A rancher can watch the eating habits of his cows, but by the time he sees a problem occur, it is too late," Stuth said. "This is why it is so important to study the cows' behavior."

Answers to the behavior of cattle will help ranchers decide when to rotate their cattle, where to put water sources and where to place fences. Not knowing when to rotate stock can result in a reduction of about 10 percent in the animals' performance.

The use of computer simulations also is helping ranchers make better decisions. These simulations show how effectively a pasture is being utilized.

"The basic concept of foraging behavior must be known before you can create adequate computer simulations," Stuth said. "Our research is designed to expand the knowledge of scientists developing these decision support systems for ranchers."

A company already is looking to license the PDL 2.

El Paso faces delay for clean water

EL PASO (AP) — About 28,000 El Paso County residents face a delay up to two years in getting clean drinking water because of federal regulations, officials said.

The federal government wants an environmental assessment or impact study before considering whether to approve a plan to provide south El Paso County rural slums with city drinking water, said Darcy Frownfelter, attorney for the Lower Valley Water District.

The district was set up last year to negotiate with the city and federal governments to provide water to residents of the poor rural areas, called "colonias."

Under the preliminary plan, the district would lease irrigation water

rights in the area, give the water to El Paso for treatment and then buy the water from the city at wholesale price.

Frownfelter said an environmental assessment would take about six months and that a more detailed impact study could take one to two years — and that neither process would be affordable.

The environmental review is necessary to get approval for the deal from the federal Bureau of Reclamation, said Ron Johnston, an official with the bureau's office in Salt Lake City. He said the bureau has not indicated which type of report is required.

The National Environmental Impact Policy Act of 1969 requires a review of the environmental side effects in the case, Johnston said.

"The conversion of some 1,500 to 3,000 acres of agricultural water rights to municipal use is considered a significant action," he said.

Frownfelter said the Lower Valley Water District can't afford the estimated \$150,000 cost of an environmental assessment or the estimated \$300,000 for an impact study.

Representatives of the water district, reclamation bureau and city plan to meet Aug. 10 to discuss the environmental reviews.

Decision expected on fate of ailing bank

DALLAS (AP) — Federal regulators were expected to decide as early as Friday whether to award financially troubled First RepublicBank Corp. to a rival bidding bank or accept the bank-holding company's own plan to recapitalize.

But industry analysts and bank officials said it was also possible the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. would declare the institution insolvent and select a bidder at a later date.

Management of First RepublicBank, which had net losses of \$2.3 billion for the first six months of 1988, and three other bidders are competing for control of the institution.

The FDIC, which rescued First RepublicBank with a \$1 billion loan in March, said it was considering all options to resolve the company's fiscal crisis.

The FDIC could also declare the company insolvent and run the institution itself until a suitor was selected in a so-called bridge bank transaction.

A bridge bank would be "one possible scenario," FDIC spokesman Steve Katsanos said.

In a memo to First RepublicBank managers Wednesday, the company said it expected a decision by the weekend. Spokesman Joe Bowles said the memo was prompted by speculation a bridge transaction was imminent.

"As the decision time grows near, we expect to see more of this speculation," Bowles said.

Richard Fitzgerald, a Washington, D.C. attorney who was chief counsel for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, said a bridge bank could be used as a timing mechanism.

"If the FDIC announced an agreement in principle, a bridge bank could give the winning bidder — assuming it's an out-of-state-bank — time to get management in place," Fitzgerald said.

Under a bridge bank, an institution is declared insolvent and the FDIC operates it under a federal charter for up to two years.

Local Briefs

Former student gives house to TAMUS

Texas A&M University System officials and former students have a place in Austin they can call their own.

The 103-year-old Hirshfeld-Moore House, formerly the Hirshfeld House, was built in 1885 by Henry Hirshfeld, a German immigrant who came to America in 1848. The house was recently renamed by the Texas A&M Board of Regents after the facility was donated to the University by a former student and his wife.

Joe and Betty Moore, of Austin, provided the resources for

the Texas A&M Development Foundation to buy and restore the two-story house at Ninth and Lavaca in Austin. It is now used by the TAMUS officials and former students for meetings and entertaining.

The Moores have provided resources for the Texas A&M University Press to produce the Moore Texas Art Series, which features the work of Texas Artists. Moore Communications Center at A&M is named in honor of the Moores because of their support of public television and radio on campus.

Universities called to assess education

Members of the 70th Texas Legislature have called upon the Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) and the University of Texas System to perform an assessment of higher education needs in South Texas.

A joint task force will be organized between TAMUS and the University System of the South (USST) after the Joint Legislative Committee on Higher Education in South Texas requested suggestions to improve the quality of higher education there.

Administrators of USST and TAMUS have met on several occasions and concluded that many opportunities exist for possible academic and research collaboration between the two systems.

The resolution that authorized the task force calls for the implementation of "a detailed analysis of the advantages, disadvantages, academic and economic desirability and feasibility of alternative forms of collaboration and/or affiliation" to be turned into the Board of Regents by Oct. 31.

TAMUS has many long-standing interests and established programs in South Texas including research and extension centers in Weslaco and Corpus Christi through the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

USST includes Texas A&M at Kingsville, Corpus Christi State University and Laredo State University.

Professor says infanticide not uncommon

By Allison Seale
Reporter

The deliberate withholding of food or neglect of children with birth defects or disabilities is used as a passive means of infanticide in many cultures around the world, an assistant professor of anthropology at Texas A&M said.

Dr. Katherine A. Dettwyler is interested in how cultural beliefs and practices influence the physical development and mortality of children.

The low number of children with birth defects in developing countries is not a result of good health habits but of inadequate care, she said.

Dettwyler spent two years in the west African nation of Mali studying this phenomenon and how it relates to infant growth, feeding practices and childhood development.

"People often marvel at how there are so few mentally retarded and physically handicapped people in non-industrialized societies," Dettwyler

said. "They think people must be very healthy."

In reality, she said, babies born with handicaps often do not survive in societies that cannot afford to offer the support devices they need, which include adequate medical care such as surgery and antibiotics.

Parents even reject the well-intentioned efforts of western health professionals to keep the babies alive, realizing that the infants' chances for long-term survival are low.

In Mali, she said, the childhood survival rate is 50 percent.

The Bambara — the major ethnic group of Mali — only begin feeding solid foods to their children when they indicate an interest. The child then feeds itself from the family's communal bowl. She said children who cannot or will not

feed themselves can become extremely malnourished and some die.

Toward the end of her stay in Mali, one of the women in Dettwyler's study gave birth to a child with no arms.

"She left the child in the house when she came out to talk because she was ashamed," Dettwyler said. "How will this child survive in a culture where no one feeds the children?"

"For an American family, it would simply be a prolongation of the normal dependence an infant has on its parents for food. Eventually, the child would be fitted with artificial limbs.

"In Mali, where people don't usually feed children to begin with and where prosthetic devices are not available, the outlook for that child is bleak."

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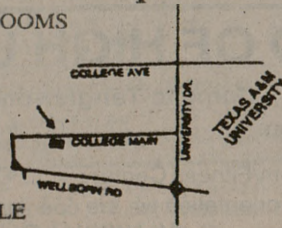
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