



BRITISH INFERTILITY COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION

Consumer DNA Testing: Implications for Families Created Though Donor Conception and for Donors and their Families

People conceived via donor conception in the past, whether children or adults, have until recently been unlikely to discover they are not genetically related to one or both of their parents, unless they had been specifically informed.

This is changing. Worldwide the use of genetic screening commercial companies offering direct-to-consumer individual DNA tests, such as 23andMe and Ancestry.co.uk, has become increasingly popular. This is usually sparked by curiosity about family history or the ever-increasing evidence on the genetic link to health. There is no sign of this slowing down. The tests are simple to do (providing a sample of hair or saliva) and their cost has dropped significantly meaning they are now affordable to many. These companies now have databases with DNA information on millions of people.

So what relevance is this to donor conception?

Anyone sending in a DNA test can also opt to search on the databases for others to whom they are genetically related. Importantly, someone (including children) can also be identified after additional genealogical research even if they themselves have not submitted a test but their close genetic relatives have. This means that donor-conceived people, recipient parents and donors can all, potentially, search or be found. It also means that donor-conceived people can be approached who are unaware of their origins; and relatives of donors who previously chose not to disclose their role as a sperm or egg donor can learn of their involvement.

How can talking to a counsellor help?

It is now HFEA policy that anyone considering donor conception treatment or offering to donate must be informed of the implications of the rise in commercial DNA testing before consenting to go ahead. Counselling can provide an opportunity to discuss this in more detail and to think through, for example, the implications for decision-making about whether, when and how, to be open and the implications of the potential for later contact for themselves and their existing and future family members.

Further reading:

HFEA – Donor conceived people and their parents

<https://www.hfea.gov.uk/donation/donor-conceived-people-and-their-parents/>

Genetic testing websites and implications for DC families DC Network article