Filemaker fertile ground for IVF group

By Nicole Manktelow
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Fertility clinics in Chatswood, Gosford, Kogarah, Randwick and Westmead played a part in the births of 10,000 babies over 20 years, so imagine the paperwork when the NSW clinics joined forces.

IVFAustralia needed a way to combine the data and achieved remarkable results using a custom-designed Filemaker database.

IVFAustralia's information systems co-ordinator, Katie Porter, says the duplication of patient information has dropped by 95 per cent compared to July last year when the clinics first united.

Back then, without a uniform system, each clinic ran different software with different reporting abilities.

"We had some off-the shelf programs that didn't combine the science and the admin," Porter says. "Even in one site, the science files and the administration information were separate.

"We would be typing in information, such as a patient's name, three to four times each time they had a visit. There were huge amounts of duplication."

The new system has cut health fund and Medicare processing time in half, and reclaimed hours from other administrative tasks.

Better record-keeping means better patient management, with every activity, report and visit tracked neatly on a patient's file.

There are benefits in the deep freeze, too, where precious contents are held for eager parents. Four-hour surveillance procedures have been cut to a 30-minute audit of the cryo-storage facilities.

When IVFAustralia first hired a developer for this project, the clinics had specific instructions.

"Assisted reproductive technologies (ART) are unique in their requirements," Porter says. "The IT has to back it up in all aspects – legal, ethical, medical, social and moral issues.

"The patients and couples experience a lot while going through

ART; we didn't want to have to change our processes to fit the software.

"We decided to change the software to fit the process."

Dzines by David Barten, an Australian developer, created the solution with a Filemaker-based system called OMZ (Office Medical Solutionz).

It is now IVFAustralia's core business application, running across all clinics on Mac OS X systems, and used by doctors, nurses, scientists and administrative staff.

"OMZ in Filemaker brings together our patient admin and scientific data. It means that we can answer any patient questions quickly, from an account inquiry to details of their last cycle."

To manipulate data and combine sources, developer David Barten had to understand the requirements for running a fertility clinic. Barten says, "We took some time analysing IVFAustralia's work flows and processes to see where duplication of records was taking place, and which areas needed more attention."

Ultimately, the system will allow all clinics in the group to share data effectively. The first steps for this are already happening.

"Information is now gathered securely, managed at different levels and shared across all clinics with the vision of even further linkage in the near future," he says.

These possibilities were not in the original brief. "Dzines was originally hired to solve a sharing problem: information between the scientific department and the medical group itself was not able to be shared through the existing databases." But Barten went one better: "We developed a `contact-centric' business strategy that allowed information to be gathered in one spot efficiently, securely managed at different levels for accurate reporting and shared across the different medical groups."

The system uses an employee-specific approach to security and tracks the data created by different staff members.

The developer also had to find a way to handle the many doctors and their provider numbers, which turned out to be a significant challenge.

"This was something that couldn't be found in any other medical database on the market. An IVFAustralia doctor needs to be identified in multiple ways.

"Depending on the service provided, the doctor will have a provider number and letterhead details for IVFAustralia or for their own practice . . .

"Some doctors work at other sites which again called for another provider number." The system creates an invoice with all provider numbers and header details automatically printed out correctly.

This story was found at:
http://smh.com.au/articles/2003/10/20/1066631346349.html