

Candour key for donor children – expert

An international authority on the psycho-social aspects of donor conception has revealed the single most important insight to have emerged from his and others extensive research into the field – the need for honesty and openness.

At a recent event in Perth, Ken Daniels, a professor of social work at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, talked of the importance of candour and stressed the need for donor children to be told – from the outset – about the circumstances of their birth.

“Children should never be able to remember a time when they didn’t know,” he said.

The event, hosted by the Reproductive Technology Council with assistance from WA Health’s Reproductive Technology Unit, was attended by health and legal professionals working in the field of assisted reproduction and members of the public with an interest in donor conception.

Professor Daniels revealed that children who had learned of their biological origins later in life were known to struggle with the discovery.

“Not because of the way they were conceived but because of the secrecy – family secrets are lethal,” he said.

Professor Daniels has held roles in counselling, research and policy development and authored two books and more than 150 academic papers on the subject.

He said it was common for parents of donor-conceived offspring to worry about broaching the topic with their child.

“My advice has always been to focus on how they as a family, came to be, not how the child was conceived because that may marginalise the child and it is not the child who is different, it is the family,” he said.

Professor Daniels advocates for a more realistic and long-term approach to donor conception, one in which the



Professor Ken Daniels revealed insights on issues of donor conception

ultimate goal is not to create a baby but to build a family.

“We need to be putting a lot more effort into preparing parents for the issues and implications that arise from donor conception.”

Among the issues prospective parents should consider are:

- how they would feel if their child grew up looking nothing like them
- the attitude of family and friends to the situation
- how they would feel if the child wanted to meet his or her donor parent
- where the donor would fit in their family

- their expectations regarding contact with the donor (one-off meeting or ongoing relationship)
- if the donor had a family of his or her own, the attitudes members of that family to the donor-conceived child and family.

Professor Daniels said donor conception was still an area of uncharted territory, one that challenged traditional notions of family and that would continue to test ethicists and communities.

To view Professor Daniels’ presentation or for more information on donor conception visit the Reproductive Technology Council website www.rtc.org.au