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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2004 D1

Inside

Cancer Patients Get Fertility Aid
Sharing Hope, a program being launched tomorrow, will help cancer patients get discounts for fertility-preservation treatments, such as egg freezing or sperm banking, before undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. Such patients typically don't qualify for other financial aid because they technically aren't infertile yet.

(Article on Page D6)

Controlling Dirty-Diaper Odor
The average child uses 4,000 diapers before being potty trained. Searching for a device that kills the diaper odor and is easy to use—though not so easy the toddler can dismantle it—Cranky Consumer rates the latest diaper disposals.



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■ **Families Insure College Investment:** More families are buying insurance that reimburses their tuition if a student has to leave college unexpectedly.

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■ **Sleep Study Supports Alternatives:** Relaxation and other nondrug therapies work better in treating sleep-onset insomnia than the top-selling sleeping pill, Ambien, according to Harvard Medical School researchers.

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■ **Off the Beaten Track:** Our Europe-based correspondents offer advice best places to dine, shop and stay in London. They say skip tea at the Ritz. (The bill, they say, is exorbitant.)



U.S. Adoptions Get Easier

Some Domestic Agencies Say They Now Have More Babies Than Applicants

By SUEIN HWANG

IT'S A PROBLEM THE NATION'S adoption agencies haven't seen in 30 years: "We desperately need couples who want to adopt babies in the U.S.," says Sue Will, maternity-services coordinator at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, one of the state's largest social-services agencies. The organization's plight reflects a remarkable shift in the adoption world. Some agencies say it is becoming considerably easier for some couples to adopt a healthy infant born in the U.S. While there are still challenges, the pool of healthy infants available for adoption appears to be experiencing an uptick in some parts of the country.

The key: the growing interest in so-called open adoptions, in which birth parents and adoptive parents exchange contact information and often stay in touch with one another.

Plus

Where to find adoption agencies and resources.

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Many adoption agencies report that open adoption is being embraced by pregnant women who might previously have been reluctant to consider giving up a baby if it meant no chance of contact later in life.

The open-adoption movement is also splitting the ranks of adoptive parents. Many experts believe that adoptive families who are willing to keep birth parents informed of a child's progress have a significant leg up in getting a baby, with openness trumping other factors like age. While some practitioners say couples hoping to adopt in their late 40s are at a relative disadvantage, a willingness to maintain contact with the birth parents is a far more important variable.



Brian Espinoza and Ivan Serdar, of Oakland, Calif., with their newly adopted daughter.

Not only do couples willing to go the open-adoption route tend to find a child more quickly, but in some cases they also have a choice of several prospective birth mothers. "I've had families with as few as three choices, and as many as 15," says Ellen Roseman, a San Anselmo, Calif.-based open adoption facilitator.

Practitioners in the San Francisco Bay area believe open adoption is part of the reason that gay couples are often picked for adoption more quickly than heterosexual couples. The region has always been particularly accepting of gay families, but agencies also say gay couples are often more willing to develop a relationship with the child's biological parents.

While there are no national statistics on private

domestic infant-adoption rates, some agencies specializing in open adoption are reporting a considerable rise in activity. Pleasant Hill, Calif.-based Independent Adoption Center, an open-adoption-only agency, says its placements have increased about 8% during the past five years. Lutheran Social Services, the Illinois agency, says it did a couple dozen placements annually during the 1990s. But the agency—which recently ran an ad promoting its open-adoption policy—has fielded 60 inquiries from potential birth parents during the past two months alone.

Some adoption experts—including Adam Please Turn to Page D9, Column 1

FDA to Probe Antidepressant Risks for Adults

After Planning Warning for Kids, Agency to Re-Examine Evidence Suggesting No Danger of Suicide

By ANNA WILDE MATHEWS

AFTER DETERMINING that antidepressants can pose a risk to young people, the Food and Drug Administration is now turning its attention to the evidence of a tie between the widely prescribed drugs and suicidal tendencies in children and adolescents. That finding—after an exhaustive re-examination of clinical-trial data on young people—led the agency to plan a strong label warning about antidepressants' risks for young people. Now FDA officials will comb through the existing data on adult clinical trials in the same detailed fashion.

"We learned from that," says Janet Woodcock, a deputy commissioner of the FDA. "It's a different way of analyzing the data." British regulators also are studying adult data for evidence of suicide risk.

The FDA has examined the issue in adults before, and found no increased risk of suicide. It's unclear why some drugs, including Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft, could increase suicidal tendencies only in a small subset of young people, and not adults. One theory is that younger people may have less control over their impulses, or less ability to cope with or understand an unexpected drug effect. "One hypothesis is that in some patients, [these drugs] have a disinhibiting effect," says Wayne Goodman, chairman of the

Adults vs. Youngsters

Why risk of suicidal behavior with antidepressants may be different in adults than young people

■ Young people may have less impulse control, or less ability to cope with an unexpected drug effect.

■ Depression in adolescents may be fundamentally different from depression in adults.

Airlines to Offer Portable Entertainment

Some Agencies Say U.S. Adoptions Get Easier

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Pertman, executive director of the New York City-based Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and Wright Walling, president of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys—say they too are seeing an increase in the availability of U.S.-born babies for adoption.

For decades, infant adoptions were on the decline. The introduction of the birth-control pill and the legalization of abortion sharply reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies, while the societal stigma attached to unwed motherhood declined as well, leading many women to raise their own children. Plummeting teen pregnancy rates also shrank the pool of available infants. Many eligible children remain available for adoption in the foster-care system, but adoptive parents typically want a newborn or toddler, rather than an older child more typically found in foster care.

According to the National Center for State Courts, the percentage of domestic adoptions (excluding those from the public welfare system) fell to 46% of the total 127,000 adoptions in 2001 (the most recent numbers available), compared with 77% in 1992. Much of that slack was taken up by the growth of international adoption.

But open adoption appears to be changing that picture in the case of at least some agencies, facilitators and adoption attorneys—an increasing number of which are offering birth mothers far more say in the adoption process. Often, that even includes the leading role in choosing the adoptive family. By contrast, almost all adoptions were handled confidentially during the past: Neither the birth mother nor the adoptive parents knew anything about the other party.

Open adoption is catching on particularly fast in the Midwest and Western parts of the country. It's less common in much of the East Coast and parts of the South. Mr. Walling of the attorneys' association estimates that 80% of domestic adoptions in Minnesota are open adoptions. Today, 18 states have made open arrangements legally enforceable. Legislation like this is relatively new, with most states passing laws just in the past few years, Mr. Walling says.

In January, just 2½ weeks after he and his partner started their adoption search in earnest, Brian Espinoza got a call from a young woman considering giving up her as-yet unborn child for adoption. He and his partner, Ivan Serdar, traveled to meet the woman and her boyfriend, and "had a great time, playing Scrabble, laughing, hanging out," Mr. Espinoza says. "We connected with them instantly," he recalls.

He later received two calls from other birth mothers. But three months ago, Mr. Espinoza and Mr. Serdar adopted Amelia—born to the first woman they met.

Not everybody is comfortable with

'Open Adoption' Resources

Information on adoption, particularly open adoption, in which the adopting parents and the biological parents maintain contact.

NAME/CONTACT	COMMENT
Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute www.adoptioninstitute.org (212) 925-4089	An education, research and policy organization that provides information on all forms of adoption.
Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project fsos.che.umn.edu/mtarp/	Results from one of the largest studies on open adoption, a joint project between the University of Minnesota, University of Texas, and Bethel University that has been studying a group of 720 adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth mothers since the 1980s.
American Adoption Congress www.americanadoptioncongress.org	A coalition of adoptive parents, birth parents, adoptees and adoption professionals that advocates openness in adoption, foster care and assisted reproduction.
National Adoption Information Clearinghouse naic.acf.hhs.gov/ (888) 251-0075	An adoption-information service of the Children's Bureau, a division of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NAIC provides statistics and other legal information for professionals and parents.
Spence-Chapin Services www.spence-chapin.org 212-369-0300	New York City-based Spence-Chapin is a full-service agency offering both open domestic and international adoptions.
The Cradle www.cradle.org 847-475-5800	The Cradle, based in Evanston, Ill., calls itself the largest infant-adoption agency in the state.
Independent Adoption Center www.adoptionhelp.org 800-877-6736	Pleasant Hill, Calif.-based Independent Adoption Center started in 1982 specializing in open domestic adoptions.

open adoption, of course. Mr. Pertman of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute says that while 90% of birth parents want to know about their children after adoption, a survey by his group found that 82% of Americans say their biggest concern about adoption is the birth parent returning to reclaim their biological child. State laws make it next to impossible for efforts like this to succeed, but a few highly publicized cases have caused families to be wary of biological parents.

Adoption practitioners say today's prospective birth mothers are older and increasingly reluctant to give up a baby up if they can't know where the child is going. For instance, when Jennifer Budz found out she had accidentally gotten pregnant, she was separated from her husband, raising two small girls, and in financial trouble. She says she couldn't have done a closed adoption, however: "I wouldn't have felt secure enough."

Ms. Budz, of Vernon, N.J., gave her son up for adoption to a couple who stays in regular touch. Today, she says she proudly displays her son's pictures on her refrigerator, and visits with him and his family periodically. "I've spoken to birth mothers who gave up their child 20 years ago, and I don't relate to all that grief and loss," she says.

One of the most obvious downsides to open adoption is the process. After months of work, usually involving criminal background checks and gathering references, interested families must write to birth mothers explaining why they would be good adoptive parents. Then, they wait to be chosen—a wait that can last anywhere from a few days to a few years. It's "like being the girl at the junior high school dance wondering if she'll be picked" says Leslie Bandle, a new adoptive mother.

Once picked, the two sides communicate and decide whether it's a match. Often they will each write up an agreement stipulating how often they might make contact. While arrangements vary widely, they might involve sending an e-mail once a month and a once-a-year visit.

The alternative for many is adopting internationally, which offers a more certain guarantee of a child after a certain period of time but carries other risks as well, particularly when adopting from countries with high rates of drug use or which may place babies first in orphanages before sending them on to be adopted.

"It depends on what your brand of risk-taking is," says Gretchen Viederman, director of the domestic adoption program at Spence-Chapin, a nonprofit adoption agency based in New York City.

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