

Georgeanna Seegar Jones (1912-2005)

Georgeanna Seegar Jones was a reproductive endocrinologist who created one of America's most successful infertility clinics and eventually, along with her husband Howard W. Jones, MD, performed the first in vitro fertilization in America, leading to the birth of Elizabeth Jordan Carr. Jones was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on 6 July 1912. Her father, Dr. John King Beck Emory Seegar, was a practicing physician at the time working in the field of obstetrics. Early in her childhood Jones had a broken bone that eventually became infected and caused a great deal of pain, inspiring her to go into the field of medicine.

Jones' education began at Goucher College in Baltimore where she received her bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1932. After graduating, she traveled to Johns Hopkins Medical School and obtained her MD in 1936. Jones then continued research in the field of reproductive physiology at Johns Hopkins University until she applied for and received a fellowship at the National Institute of Health, where she was able to continue her work until 1939. It was at this point that Jones took a position working at Johns Hopkins Medical School, serving in a number of different positions including the director of the reproductive physiology lab as well as the head gynecologist of the Gynecological Endocrine Clinic at Johns Hopkins. Jones continued working in both positions, eventually becoming a full-time professor of gynecology and obstetrics until her retirement in 1978.

During her time at Johns Hopkins, Jones conducted a great deal of research in the area of reproductive physiology leading to many important discoveries. The most significant was the recognition of the pregnancy hormone chorionic gonadotropin, which eventually led to the creation of the home pregnancy test. It was also while working at Johns Hopkins that Georgeanna met and married her husband, Howard W. Jones, in 1940. From this point on, the two collaborated on their gynecological studies and their work eventually provided Johns Hopkins with a reputation as an important institution in the field of gynecological research.

In 1949 Jones and her husband began researching infertility and focused on the luteal phase deficiency, an affliction that involves insufficient progesterone, a female hormone important in pregnancy. Jones cited this deficiency as a cause of miscarriage and infertility in women and her research provided the most thorough description of the process to date, offering a better understanding of infertility and its causes. Her extensive research also inspired her to continue in the study of infertility.

After retiring from their positions at Johns Hopkins in 1978, Eastern Virginia Medical School hired both Joneses as professors of Obstetrics and Gynecology. It was around this time that Robert Edwards and Patrick Steptoe delivered the world's first baby from in vitro fertilization in England. This event inspired the Joneses to recreate the methods of Steptoe and Edwards in America, while also improving upon them, in order to deliver the first test-tube baby in the United States. In order to do this, they sought funding for the creation of the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine, an infertility clinic that would become very successful. The clinic had its grand opening on 1 March 1980.

The number of women desiring treatment from the clinic was overwhelming despite a great deal of media backlash regarding the clinic's goal of creating a child through in vitro fertilization. Georgeanna Jones and her husband would eventually succeed in this goal with the birth of Jordan Elizabeth Carr on 28 December 1981. The methods used were similar to those employed by Steptoe and Edwards but also included a regime of fertility drugs that increased egg production in the patients taking them. From this point, the clinic went on to help thousands of mothers with infertility problems become pregnant through the use of in vitro fertilization as well as other

techniques such as artificial insemination and the use of fertility medications. By the time of Georgeanna's death from heart failure on 26 March 2005, the clinic had assisted in over 3,000 births, allowing Jones to leave a legacy of countless mothers that would not have had children without her help.

Sources

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