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SPECIAL SESSION ON PREVENTION TECHNOLOGIES

Technological Innovation Under Restrictive Regulatory Conditions

The Strange Case of the Ethics-Driven Development of Preconception Genetic Diagnosis

Pre-Conception Genetic Diagnosis (PcGD) is a diagnostic method for the indirect genetic analysis of oocytes that are to be implanted in utero as part of in vitro fertilization (IVF) procedures. Developed in 1990, this technique of selection of oocytes has been rapidly discarded after the first clinical successes of Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), which allows direct analysis of the genetic makeup of a developing embryo.

The limited conditions imposed by German and Italian laws, according to analysis or cryopreservation of embryos are prohibited, made PGD unfeasible. As a result, PcGD had become, for some years at least, the only legal option for couples at high genetic risk for prevention of genetic disease. At the same, it arises new questions on the definition of the status of embryo. The empirical materials coming from textual analysis of medico-scientific literature, and interviews with experts (both gynecologists and geneticists) describes an interesting case of how ethics may be incorporated in a technology. This case study may shed light on a more empirical approach to bioethics concerned with the practical impact of abstract principles in medical practices and procedures.