

## Psychiatrist to become UK's oldest mother at 63

By Sarah Boseley, health editor  
From The Guardian Unlimited on May 4, 2006

A 63-year-old child psychiatrist is set to become Britain's oldest mother after fertility treatment in Italy with the maverick scientist Severino Antinori.

Patricia Rashbrook, who is a consultant with the East Sussex child and adolescent mental health service, is seven months pregnant, according to today's Sun newspaper. Her second husband, academic John Farrant, 61, told the paper: "We are of course both very happy and looking forward to the birth. Obviously at our age it is quite a daunting prospect." Dr Rashbrook, who has two children in their 20s from her first marriage, said to the newspaper: "I wasn't keen for this to come out yet but I am happy. Now I'd like my privacy respected." The pregnancy is likely to be controversial, however. In November 1997 there was an outcry over the birth of a son to 60-year-old Liz Buttle, who had lied to a fertility clinic in the UK about her age. She claimed to be 49 to qualify for treatment.

In January this year, more controversy broke over the birth of a daughter to 66-year-old Adriana Iliescu, a retired university professor in Romania, who said she had not previously had time to have a family. She is thought to be the world's oldest mother and received IVF from Romanian doctor Bogdan Marinescu. In India, teacher Satyabhama Mahapatra had a boy in 2003 when she was 65. She used an egg from her niece fertilised by her niece's husband.

Dr Rashbrook would not have been treated in the UK, where the authorities consider she is too old. Last week the Human Fertility and Embryology Authority (HFEA) warned against "fertility tourism" - couples seeking treatment abroad that is not permitted in Britain. Most clinics in the UK will not accept a woman over 45. Her choice of doctor is also problematic. Dr Antinori has helped several women in their 60s to become pregnant using donor eggs because they are past the menopause and unable to produce their own. But he also achieved worldwide publicity when he and Panos Zavos from the US proclaimed that they would produce the world's first cloned baby, and said they had a queue of couples willing to be guinea pigs.

The HFEA said last week that patients should consider the standards and regulations in foreign clinics, where there might be no redress if things go wrong. Suzi Leather, chair of the HFEA, said: "We have heard of some clinics which offer treatment to patients that is so dangerous that it has been banned in the UK - for example implanting five embryos which significantly raises the chance of multiple pregnancy - the biggest risk of IVF for both mothers and babies. "It is very sad when we receive complaints from patients about their treatment abroad and we are not able to help or reassure them. We would urge patients to think twice and consider the risks and implications before going abroad for treatment."

Having a child at 63 is fraught with physical and social complications. Mothers aged over 40 have double the risk of stillbirth and ectopic pregnancy. UK clinics refuse to help women conceive on the basis that the welfare of the child cannot be assured with parents who will be in their 70s by the time the child is 10. Others, however, argue that men and women are living longer than ever and are more physically fit than people of their age used to be.

Pauline Lyon, who in 1995 was Britain's oldest mother when she gave birth to a son at the age of 55, said recently of other older mothers: "I don't think it's wrong. It's hard to say if there really should be an upper age limit. It is down to whether the person is healthy. I think 'Good on her'."