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Study Shows Mothers older than 50 do not have reduced parenting capacity

Los Angeles, Oct. 23, 2006— Mothers who give birth after the age of 50 do not have reduced parenting capacity compared to younger mothers, a study led by the Univ. of North Carolina's Anne Z. Steiner and Univ. of Southern California's Richard Paulson has concluded.

Steiner, an assistant professor in the UNC School of Medicine's department of obstetrics and gynecology, will present the findings Tuesday, Oct. 24, at the annual meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine in New Orleans. The study is believed to be the first to evaluate parenting in women who conceive after age 50.

This is the latest installment of a series of studies of women over 50 pioneered by Paulson, professor of obstetrics and gynecology and Chief of the Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility at the Keck School of Medicine of the Univ. of Southern California.

"Thirteen years ago the question was, is it possible for women of this age to have children? The answer was 'yes,'" says Paulson. "The next question was, were the obstetrical outcomes good? The answer to that was also 'yes.' Now that this procedure has been going on long enough, we felt we had an opportunity to ask the question, 'how are these older mothers coping with parenthood?' And the results are very reassuring."

In the study, conducted while Steiner was at the University of Southern California, 49 women who conceived and delivered after age 50 with the help of USC's assisted reproductive technology program were matched to women in their 40s and 30s who also conceived with the program's help. 129 of these women were mailed questionnaires on parenting stress and physical and mental well-being.

Fifty percent of the women returned completed questionnaires. Their self-reported results showed that the women in their 50s had slightly lower physical functioning scores than the younger women, but the older women had higher mental functioning scores. There was no significant difference between the older and younger women in terms of overall parenting stress.

"We must remember this group does not represent the average 50 to 55 year old," says Paulson. "They are healthier, self-selected, vigorous and they are adapting very well to the stresses of parenting."

Steiner and co-author Paulson concluded that their study does not support the hypothesis that mothers who conceive and give birth after age 50 have reduced parenting capacity compared to mothers in their 40s and 30s.

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