

Robert Edwards

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Sir Robert Geoffrey Edwards CBE, FRS (27 September 1925–10 April 2013), a British physiologist, successfully pioneered conception through in vitro fertilization, which led to the birth of Louise Brown on 26 July 1978. The road to success, however, was bumpy from the beginning when in 1963, now 50 years ago, Robert started to collect human eggs for in vitro fertilization. There was a barrage of critical ethical questions and he found no partnership in the academic medical world. However, his work was motivated by his belief that "the most important thing in life is having a child." Fortunately, he contacted in 1968 a gynecologist specialized in laparoscopy, Patrick Steptoe, who could aspirate oocytes from their follicles. They started a clinic in Oldham, but the Medical Research Council refused to fund it. Ovarian stimulation with human menopausal gonadotropin and HCG produced several follicles and fertilization and embryo growth in vitro proceeded excellently. They began transfers from 1972, but failed to have a clinical pregnancy. They realized that they were faced with the problem of

luteal phase deficiency, which they tried to correct till they had a first clinical pregnancy, which sadly was ectopic. By moving back to natural menstrual cycle IVF and single oocyte aspiration, they had success in the second patient after transfer of an eight-cell stage embryo. Louise Brown was born on 26 July 1978. However, no official support was forthcoming, although the demand was immense. More than 1,000 children were born by 1989. Major ethical arguments continued and Robert had to issue several libel actions in the High Court of London, which he all won, but at the expense of work and research during several years. Finally, venture capital was obtained and Bourn Hall was opened in September 2000. The pioneer was awarded the 2010 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. The Nobel Committee praised him for advancing treatment of infertility and noted that IVF babies are as healthy as others babies.

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