



[Special to National Post](#)

March 28, 2013

12:28 AM EDT

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'I thought I just had to sleep it off': Egg donor sues Toronto fertility doctor after suffering stroke



Courtesy of Kylee Gilman

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A young Florida woman who suffered a stroke after donating her eggs to a Canadian couple is suing a Toronto fertility doctor and a U.S. egg donor agency for alleged negligence.

Kylee Gilman, 24, says that within hours of having 45 eggs removed from her ovaries at the CReATe clinic, in Toronto, she felt nauseous and began vomiting. The following day, Nov. 12, 2011, she suffered a stroke.

Ms. Gilman filed her suit Wednesday in Duval County, Fla., against Dr. Edward Ryan, of the Toronto West Fertility Centre, a satellite of CReATe, and Giving Hope, an egg donor agency headquartered in Dallas. She alleges Dr. Ryan prescribed too much medication and failed to give her good advice once she got ill.

The allegations have not been tested in court. Dr. Ryan declined comment Wednesday, saying he “shouldn’t say anything at this time.” The next step is for the doctor and agency to file their defence with the court.

Ms. Gilman received \$5,500 from Giving Hope. In Canada, it is a crime to pay an egg donor, but a popular way around the law is to make payments through a U.S.-based agency and have an American donor fly in for the procedure. It is estimated a few hundred U.S. donors fly to Canada every year for this purpose. Donors take drugs to produce extra eggs, which are then extracted and given to people who need them to conceive.

Ms. Gilman signed on as an egg donor with Giving Hope in early 2011. A few months later, she was told that a Canadian couple had selected her — anonymous donor #2327 — and that the egg donation would take place in Toronto.

She says she flew up for a single day at the end of October, so Dr. Ryan could give her the medications she would need and instruct her on how to use them. She began injecting herself that night. A clinic in Jacksonville, Fla., checked her response to the medication a few days later, according to records obtained by the *National Post*. Based on their findings, which indicated a strong response, Dr. Ryan told her to reduce her dose, which she did.

Ms. Gilman flew back to Toronto the following week. An ultrasound indicated that her ovaries contained a large number of eggs. “He was happy with the results,” Ms. Gilman recalls.

It is widely agreed in the medical literature that an optimal number of eggs is about 15 and that very high numbers can put a donor’s health at significant risk. “When you aim at 15, you will always have some patients who will have 30 eggs,” says Matt Gysler,

president of the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society, an advisory body to the country's reproductive specialists. The key is to manage the patient closely, he says.

Ms. Gilman was permitted to fly home the same day her 45 eggs were retrieved. She had begun to feel unwell shortly after the retrieval, she says, throwing up in the elevator at her hotel and in the hotel room as she tried to rest. She continued to vomit on her two flights home. By the time her boyfriend met her in the Jacksonville airport, she was lying on the carpet in the luggage hall, too tired to stand up.

Her boyfriend called Dr. Ryan that night, and twice the following day, according to the doctor's records. Ms. Gilman recalls her boyfriend describing her nausea, pain and swelling abdomen to the doctor. "He said 'She'll be OK. Give her Gatorade. Give her the meds I prescribed,'" she says. "I thought I just had to sleep it off."

When she woke later from a brief afternoon nap, however, she says she started to wonder if something was seriously wrong. "I reached for the Gatorade, but I had no sensation of an arm," she recalls. She called her boyfriend, but her words were slurred. When she discovered she couldn't walk, her boyfriend called an ambulance.

Ms. Gilman was taken to the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Jacksonville, where, according to medical records, doctors confirmed she'd had a stroke. They also diagnosed her with severe ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS), a complication of stimulating the ovaries, and which causes fluid to seep from the blood vessels, making blood thicker and more likely to form clots. Records indicate that during her 10 days in hospital, in addition to being treated for her stroke, she had several litres of fluid drained from her abdomen and from around her lungs, was treated for "acute kidney injury," and had three blood transfusions. While still in hospital, Ms. Gilman received the payment from Giving Hope.

Ms. Gilman alleges in her lawsuit that the stroke occurred because the doctor prescribed too much medication, which led to OHSS. Ms. Gilman further alleges that he gave bad advice once she became ill.

John Jain, a fertility specialist who runs Santa Monica Fertility, in California, says a stroke following egg donation is "an incredibly rare event."

More than a year after the injury, Ms. Gilman says she still doesn't have full feeling in the right side of her body, can't grip properly with her right hand and suffers from memory loss.



Courtesy of Kylee Gilman