A tribute to Robert Edwards and Howard Jones Jr

"2010 was a fascinating year. Robert Edwards finally received the Nobel prize for Medicine and his friend in the United States, Howard W. Jones Jr. was honored in Denver by the American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) upon his Centennial Birthday. He turned 100 on December 30th"

As the editor of "Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn", I am very proud to announce that Howard W. Jones Jr. accepted to be an ***honored member*** *of our* ***Editorial Board***. Dr Jones is still opinionated, humble and charming, and he has still a lot to say about the past and future of ObGyn. He is still very active scientifically and two of his papers were published in our journal last year. He recently wrote a book together with Susan L. Crockin, a legal expert in the field of legal issues of assisted reproductive technologies. The book is called: Legal Conceptions: The Evolving Law and Policy of assisted reproductive technologies (Fig. 1).

Howard Jones Jr., is world renowned in the field of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and infertility. He pioneered IVF technologies in the US. He was born in Baltimore on 30-12-1910. He received his MD in 1935 from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. In 1960, Howard and his wife Georgeanna Jones became full-time faculty members at Johns Hopkins, in order to devote themselves more fully to research in gynecology and obstetrics. Howard Jones, a surgeon by the way, was doing sex change operations at Johns Hopkins and established the crytogenetics laboratory when the field was in its infancy. In the 1960s, he conducted laboratory studies of sperm and oocytes – immature eggs – with the British scientist **Robert Edwards**, who helped create the world's first test tube baby, born in England in 1978. The Joneses retired from Johns Hopkins in 1978 and were appointed professors of obstetrics and gynecology at Eastern Virginia Medical School, where they established the first in vitro fertilization program in the United States. He opened the IVF clinic in Norfolk in 1979. The Joneses had 41 failures before their first success. In the days before hormones were used to prompt the ovary to spew several eggs, doctors had only one egg per month to try to fertilize. Despite general medical consensus against hormone drugs at that time, Georgeanna Jones had a hunch that hMG – human menopausal gonadotropin – which prompts the release of several eggs, would increase the odds of success. They had 12 failed in vitro fertilization attempts with hMG before the first patient got pregnant. The first IVF baby in the US was a fact, due to a lot of "Views & Vision".

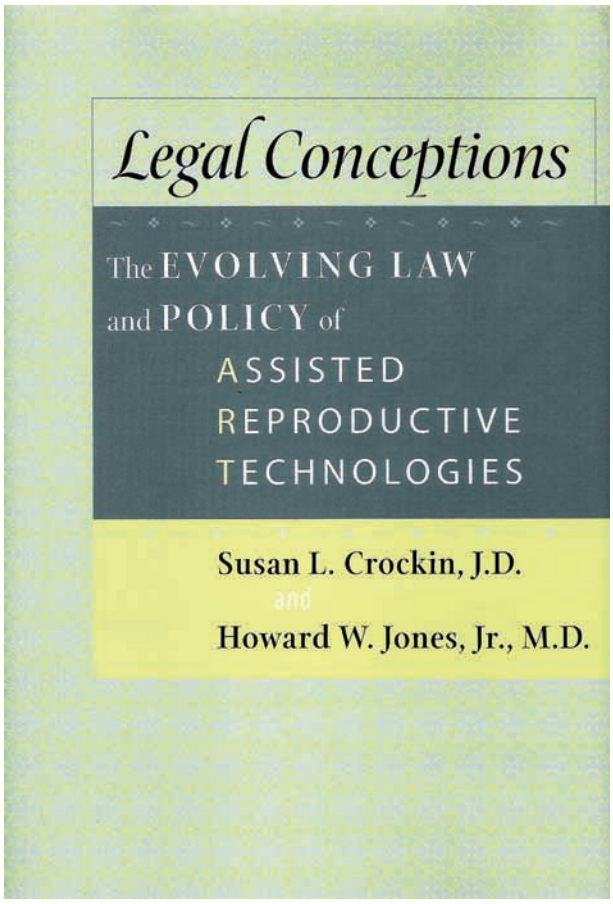

Fig. 1. — The book "Legal Conceptions: The Evolving Law and Policy of assisted reproductive technologies" by Howard Jones and Susan Crockin, published in 2010.

Robert Edwards became the Nobel Laureate in 2010. The British scientist who pioneered in-vitro fertilisation has been awarded for applying visionary, extraordinary research to change the lives of people all over the world. Human IVF has radically changed


Fig. 2. — Bob Edwards and Howard Jones on stage in Genk, 1995

the field of reproductive medicine. Today, 2% to 3% of all newborns in many countries are conceived with the help of IVF.

Bob Edwards was born in 1925 in Manchester and, serving in the army in the second world war, studied biology at the University of Wales in Bangor and at Edinburgh University. At the latter, he worked on a PhD in 1955 studying the development of embryos in mice. Robert Edwards developed the IVF technique in a research career that started in 1958 at the National Institute for Medical Research in London and continued at the world's first IVF centre, the Bourn Hall Clinic in Cambridge, founded with the English surgeon, Patrick Steptoe. The work of Robert Edwards has always been controversial but he has never shrunk from confronting that controversy. He was a real visionary, and always ahead of his time on so many issues – not just IVF – but also on PGD in the 60s, stem cells in the 70s, and the whole process of ethical thinking. By a brilliant combination of basic and applied medical research, Edwards overcame one technical hurdle after another in his persistence to discover a method that would help to alleviate infertility. Before Edwards began his work in the 1950s, it took almost two decades of basic scientific study of the life cycle of human eggs before Edwards and coworkers, in 1969, were able to successfully fertilise human eggs outside the human body. Nine years later, in 1978, Louise Brown was born by caesarean section after a full-term pregnancy. Since more than 30 years IVF became an established technique to help infertile couples, opening new avenues of hope for millions of couples throughout the world.

In 2000, Bob Edwards founded a new Scientific Journal called “Reproductive BioMedicine Online”. Once again he showed his visionary capacities. By recognizing the increasing power of the internet, he created a new style of Journal, one where abstracts of submitted papers would appear online immediately, helping the scientists and researchers to publish their work more quickly than ever before. Once again, a true pioneer.

It’s not known why it took so long before the Nobel Prize was awarded to the pioneer of IVF and it’s regrettable that Patrick Steptoe was not recognized since he died in 1988. Patrick and Bob formed a unique and fruitful combination of an extraordi-

Fig. 3. — Howard and Georgeanna Jones at their private home in Norfolk (1997)

nary scientist and an open-minded clinician. They should have shared the award!

On the occasion of the 2nd meeting of 'Andrology in the Nineties' in 1995, I had the privilege to invite both pioneers, Bob Edwards and Howard Jones, to Genk, Belgium (Fig. 2, 3). I'll never forget their enthusiasm and the richness of their visionary ideas and beliefs. They inspired me and so many others …

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