

Meet our Deputy Editor

Dr Kay Elder



Kay Elder, MD PhD FRSM, joined *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* as Deputy Editor in July 2007, with 24 years of experience in reproductive biomedicine. Her introduction to IVF arrived with a chance telephone call in 1984: [*“There is no such thing as chance; and what seems to us merest accident springs from the deepest source of destiny”* (Johann Friedrich Von Schiller)]: Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards at Bourn Hall Clinic were in desperate need of a locum doctor, and contacted the Cambridge University Clinical School to see if they could recommend anyone available to help. Kay had graduated with an MB BChir from Cambridge in 1981, but found the duties of a newly qualified doctor incompatible with raising a family – part-time opportunities were not available in the 1980s, and she chose to take a career break in order to care for her two young children. After a 1-week locum period, Mr Steptoe created a tailored part-time clinical post, and her involvement at Bourn increased and developed to full-time as her children grew up. In 1987 she was appointed Head of the Outpatient Department, and managed the Clinic’s transition from in-patient to out-patient treatment cycles.

Kay studied medicine as a second (and secondary) career, having worked in a variety of clinical and research laboratories since 1964. Following a Diploma in Chemistry in Dundee (with Distinction and Special Merit), she graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Biochemistry from St Andrews University. A Fellowship awarded by the National Institutes of Health in the USA allowed her to pursue a PhD in Experimental Pathology at the University of Colorado Medical School, where her thesis research encompassed studies on the molecular biology of oncogenic viruses (published as a leading article in *Nature* in 1973). In 1974 she took up a research position at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund in London, and continued research that included in-vitro translation of oncogenic viral mRNA and sequencing of the Influenza virus haemagglutinin. Intrigued by the connection between cellular and molecular biology and the ‘bigger picture’ of clinical disease, she decided to study medicine, with translational/clinical oncology research as a goal. The Foulkes Foundation, established to promote collaboration between medicine and science, awarded her a scholarship in 1978, and she returned to full-time study towards a medical degree at Cambridge University. Her son Robbie was born during the second clinical year, and her daughter Bethany at the end of her pre-registration year. Although at the time she regarded family commitments as a temporary detour from the original goal of clinical oncology research, at Bourn Hall she immediately saw IVF as a significant and important collaboration

between science and medicine, an ideal route for her combined interests. She was instantly fascinated by the scientific potential of IVF, and clinical embryology in particular; by 1988 she was a Senior Embryologist in the IVF lab.

In 1989, Professor Edwards inaugurated a programme of workshops and seminars at Bourn Hall, and with her combined medical/scientific experience in IVF, Kay was appointed Director of Training. For the next 16 years she planned, coordinated, directed and taught a large and varied educational programme at Bourn Hall, for doctors, scientists, nurses and other healthcare professionals – an ideal opportunity to continue her lifelong passion for studying and learning. Appreciating the enormous void in availability of education within the field of clinical embryology, she started writing textbooks with a clinical embryology focus, and working towards the establishment of post-graduate degree courses. In 1994 she became a founder member and Executive Secretary of Alpha – Scientists in Reproductive Medicine, an international society devoted to the science of IVF, and for the next 7 years edited and produced a quarterly newsletter as a readily available source of information and communication in the field. The newsletter was translated and produced in Spanish, Italian and Turkish. In 1998 she became a Visiting Professor at the Danube University of Krems, and directed the post-graduate course Master of Advanced Studies in Clinical Embryology, taught by experienced embryologists from the UK, Europe, and the USA. With the help of Roger Gosden and his colleagues, a distance-learning MSc in Clinical Embryology was established at the University of Leeds in 2000, and as Honorary Senior Lecturer there she continues to mentor and tutor students on this course. She has now been author of, and edited, several textbooks and numerous publications related to the science of IVF, and continues to monitor results and data, as well as manage the research embryo bank at Bourn Hall Clinic in her current post as Senior Research Scientist there.

Kay was born in Scotland, but her family moved to Mexico when she was very young, and her roots lie firmly established in the Latin culture where she grew up. She is fluent in Spanish, and has a competent knowledge of French, Italian and German. Her main interests reflect the background of her Mexican upbringing – her children, friends, music, dancing, cooking – and enjoying life to the full, with leisure activities that include music of all kinds (classical in particular), opera, dance, playing the piano – and taking care of her large and varied collection of plants.