Evaluation of the first five years of the postgraduate master course „Clinical Embryology“

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Clinical embryologists are much specialised scientists who work in fertility treatment and reproductive research. They perform routine diagnostic services and therapeutic embryological procedures, such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF), at hospitals and private clinics. Clinical embryologists need a practical and theoretical understanding of human reproductive biology, genetics, embryology, infertility and assisted reproductive technology (ART). They also need to keep up to date with current regulations and local legislation involving these subjects. In the field of clinical embryology, professionals working in in-vitro fertilisation laboratories could in the past acquire skills nearly only by “best practice” and / or “learning by doing”. However, clinical embryology needs new and science-based possibilities to further develop and to convey the required extensive knowledge to clinical embryologists.

The four semester university course “Clinical Embryology” meets these requirements. It has been developed according to the requirement profile for embryologists of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) and offers comprehensive training. The graduates will have acquired the necessary technical, scientific and ethical knowledge as well as the required soft skills to be able, already after a very short induction period, to work independently in an IVF laboratory and in all institutions dealing with reproductive medicine.

After 5 years and more than 40 graduates the training, the research quality and “job perspectives” of the students should be the central focus of graduate program evaluation. We used following characteristics for evaluation:

- Time-to-degree
- Student gender and age
- Student primary education/profession
- Work experience in clinical embryology before enrolment
- Percent international students
- Completion rate
- Publications
- Present job description
Preliminary conclusion: In June 2014 the 5th master course in Clinical embryology will start at the University of Graz, still to be the only in German-speaking countries. Even though the course was designed to train new employees, most of the students of the first course were very experienced working as IVF gynaecologists or senior embryologists. Over the years we could recognise a decline in MDs and an increase in inexperienced students with a background in natural sciences. Surprisingly, all the courses were very international with students from Germany, Switzerland, Greece and Romania. All graduates are employed.