The recent delivery of octuplets at Kaiser Bellflower Hospital outside Los Angeles was marked by many as a celebration and a miracle, demonstrating the wonders of medical technology. I would suggest that it is neither cause for celebration nor a miracle. Rather it is an example of an irresponsible use of reproductive technology.

Initially we were told that no one knew what, if any infertility technology was used to facilitate these births. But there are only two ways a woman becomes pregnant with octuplets?the chance of this happening naturally is infinitesimally small. In this case, the woman in question had embryos left over from previous IVF cycles and had all of her remaining embryos implanted at once?a highly irresponsible way of proceeding. In general, in vitro fertilization (IVF), if done properly, is highly unlikely to produce eight pregnancies since virtually all infertility clinics adhere to guidelines limiting the number of embryos implanted through IVF to three or less.

Major multiple pregnancies like this one almost always result today from the use of hyper-ovarian stimulation, similar to the procedure for harvesting multiple eggs for use in GIFT or IVF procedures, in conjunction with normal sex or insemination with donor or husband?s sperm. This is the little known fact about intra-uterine insemination today. When you do the math in this procedure, the woman is releasing multiple eggs, normally anywhere from 5-15 eggs, combined with 1-2 million sperm, and the possibility for major multiples is a clear risk. Women sometimes opt for this method instead of IVF because it costs much less. Of course, infertility clinics always present the woman with the option of selective termination of some of the pregnancies. But many women, including the mother of the octuplets, are unwilling to do that because they,
correctly, in my view, see this as abortion and have understandable moral qualms about such a procedure, especially since they have gone to such lengths to create life.

The use of hyper ovarian stimulation with insemination leaves the woman and the physician without the ability to control how many pregnancies result from the procedure. *This puts the woman at risk for something that she was not designed for?carrying ?litters? of children.* One Arizona woman gave birth to six children almost a year ago and nearly died of heart failure in the procedure, illustrating these risks to the woman. *Furthermore, it puts the babies at risk for something they were not designed for?being born seriously prematurely,* here about 10 weeks too early. As a result, the children will likely face a lifetime of health challenges with exorbitant costs accompanying them. The costs of the delivery alone were substantial, since the delivery involved, according to one report, 46 different physicians and hospital staff. Amazingly, as of today, all eight of the babies were breathing on their own and appeared to be doing well. But they are a long way from being out of the woods, medically speaking. Though I support many technological options to alleviate infertility, the one used in the creation of the Bellflower octuplets puts both the women and the babies at risk for something they were not designed for.

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