

TURNING TO TECHNOLOGY FOR HEALTHY BABIES >> 3B**TURNING TO TECHNOLOGY FOR FULLY HEALTHY BABIES****Thailand** may become hub for business modelWANNAPA KHAOPA
THE NATION
Sydney, Australia

While many wanna-be mothers around the world are ready to pay for in vitro fertilisation (IVF), some are being enticed to go further: paying for the technology that could detect chromosome abnormalities – known as comparative genomic hybridisation (CGH) – and ensure a fully healthy baby.

That is a business model pursued jointly by Superior ART, a centre for assisted reproduction technology, in cooperation with Genea, a Sydney-based company specialising in fertility, for the Thai and pan-Asian markets.

“Because of the strong relationship between Superior ART and Genea, our technologies are being transferred to Superior before any other clinics around the world,” Steven McArthur, scientific director of Genea, told *The Nation* during a recent visit to the company in Sydney.

Genea has about 20 centres in many countries. In 2011, it was able to transfer 14,000 embryos across its network globally and close to 70,000-80,000 children were born from its technologies. Together, the partners want to make IVF more successful in Asia, and through Superior, Genea’s technologies will be made available in other parts of Asia.

A scientist performs a freezing process at a sperm lab of Genea.



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According to Tomas Stojanov, chief executive officer of Genea, Superior will serve as the springboard for his company’s expansion in Asia. The expansion comes after investment of millions of Australian dollars in research and development in the past 20 years.

Stojanov said it had achieved a pregnancy rate of 65-70 per cent among all ages. Women aged over 40 who undertook CGH reported a 42-per-cent pregnancy rate, while for other clinics it was almost impossible for women aged over 40 to get pregnant.

“Currently, we are the biggest PGD [pre-implantation genetic diagnosis] clinic in the world measured by the number of disorders,” Stojanov said.

Superior has provided fertility service to people from different countries – 20 per cent of them are Thai and 80 per cent are from other countries, including South Africa, Vietnam, Myanmar and China. It is investing Bt20 million to Bt40 million in establishing a new centre in the northeastern province of Udon Thani to serve more people from neighbouring countries.

It has managed IVF and PGD laboratories in more than 10 private hospitals locally and in other coun-

tries and also trained medical schools, according to Sarayuth Assamakorn, managing director of Superior.

“Now in this region, we are smaller than other ART groups in Singapore. We aim to be the hub of Asia and have the most branches in Asia by the next two to three years,” he said. The latest technology introduced last year in Thailand is comparative genome hybridisation, which gave many Thai women aged over 35 the chance to get pregnant and have a healthy baby.

Thailand is among the first countries in the world to offer CGH technology, aside from Australia, Britain, the United States, France and Spain. The service is in exchange for a patient fee of up to Bt300,000.

A part of PGD techniques, CGH provides about 99-per-cent accuracy in detecting chromosome abnormalities, which cause genetic disorders, Sarayuth said.

“Women who undergo CGH with us have a 70-per-cent pregnancy rate,” he said. “CGH helps doctors and scientists to look at all 24 chromosomes in an embryo from a single biopsy.”

Sarayuth said that among around 200 ART centres nationwide, Superior was the only centre in Thailand able to screen 125 types of genetic disorders, including thalassaemia and Down’s syndrome – which have affected many Thais.

He said his company had performed almost 1,000 cycles to assist reproduction per year and it was trying to get more of its patients to undergo CGH.

More technology transfers are promised under the partnership. Recently, Genea launched a new innovation – an embryo culture medium, a liquid in which embryos are grown. What the new culture medium has shown is a very big improvement in the ability or capacity of embryos grown in the medium to lead to pregnancy. The improvement is more than 25 per cent greater than in all culture media currently available.