



Medical Specialties Must Work Together to Combat Infertility

Approximately 15 percent of couples are unable to have a baby after one year of trying to get pregnant. Experts say that couples should seek medical evaluation after one year of attempted conception, or sooner if they have known fertility risks such as age or genetic factors. Like Brent and Gina, many couples are surprised to encounter infertility, particularly male-factor infertility. Female-factor infertility has typically dominated the conversation during the last few decades, but in fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, infertility among heterosexual couples is about 40 percent attributable to men, 40 percent attributable to women, with the remaining 20 percent as a combination of both. However, men may be less inclined to seek fertility treatments than women.

"Generally speaking, when a couple is seeking treatment for problems with fertility it's usually driven by the wife," explained Dr. Honig. Men may view fertility treatments as pertaining to women only, or as a threat to their manhood. Additionally, women are typically already seeing a gynecologist in their 20's and 30's, whereas most men do not have routine appointments with their urologists until they are older.

"Nine out of 10 men that I see for fertility treatments have been sent by gynecologists, referred because the man does not have enough sperm for IVF," reported Dr. Lipshultz. However, according to Dr. Lipshultz, "only about one in five men that are part of an infertile couple ever end up being seen by a urologist. That's not even close to proportionate to the incidence of male-factor infertility."

The number of urologists specializing in fertility in the United States falls far short of the number of OB/GYNs specializing in reproductive endocrinology. Ideally, when treating a couple, reproductive endocrinologists would work in cooperation with urologists, but while there are a few exceptions, most fertility programs are not set-up to support such a relationship. There are less than ten medical programs in the country training urologists in infertility management. Consequentially, while there are thousands of reproductive endocrinologists in the U.S., Dr. Ross said "in terms of urologists specializing in fertility, there are only about 250 to 300 that have the necessary training to provide for education and support, but the programs are growing."