

Five things I wish my doctor knew about infertility

As a doctor, each day you care for those of us who are struggling with infertility as we seek healing for the issues preventing us from conceiving or carrying a child to term. We appreciate your hard work and dedication to helping us. We know that you care deeply about us, so we want to share some things you should know so that you can better support us as we walk this difficult and lonely path of infertility.

We need you to truly listen when we express our concerns.

When it comes to reproductive health, many of us have, at one time or another, felt unheard, “written-off” or misunderstood. When we express worry over not having yet conceived, or having experienced a loss (or multiple losses), we are placing all of our hopes and dreams of parenthood in your hands. We know how busy you are, but please take the time to understand our unique situation and appreciate our personal struggle. Also know that aside from our spouse, you may be the only person we feel comfortable discussing this with.

Our pain is real, and it is physical, emotional and spiritual.

While a physical diagnosis probably brought us into your office, infertility and loss also have emotional and spiritual components that are very painful. As a doctor, please don't be afraid to suggest that your patient see a therapist and/or a spiritual director to help with the grief process. As patients, we may think, “I shouldn't need professional help”, or “I have nothing to grieve over”, and we may be unconsciously waiting for someone to give us permission to seek help. As someone with a vocation to care for the whole person, you can be the one to give that permission.

The Catholic Church has teachings on reproductive technologies...

These teachings help us understand that the child is a gift and not a right, and how we can participate with God in His creative work – not remove Him from the equation or take His place. They also seek to preserve the dignity of the marital bond, as every child deserves to be the direct result of the love between their mother and father in cooperation with God. For these reasons, artificial reproductive technologies such as IVF, IUI, sperm or egg donation and surrogacy, among others, are not considered to be licit means of achieving conception by the Catholic Church.

...and yes, they are important to us.

Many Catholics experiencing infertility have, at some point during the process of seeking treatment, had to defend our beliefs from the exam table. Please be mindful of these teachings and refrain from placing any undue pressure or inadvertent shame on the patient. Especially given our vulnerable position, it is very difficult to have to explain that we are not willing to do whatever it takes to achieve conception if it means going against the teachings of the Church. What is most important to us is not conceiving by any means necessary, but cooperating with God's will and being with Him in Heaven.

Our lives and marriages can be fruitful, even if our hopes for biological children go unrealized.

Not every infertility story ends with a baby, but that doesn't mean that our desire to parent will go unfulfilled. This desire is good and is God-given! The lives and marriages of people with and without children are fruitful in many ways; for example, by caring for others, adopting children, working in their communities and more! In fact, we believe that as a doctor, you live out your spiritual parenthood through serving and caring for your patients every day. You can encourage us by remembering that even if treatment is not successful, this does not mean our fruitfulness will be limited.

For more resources, visit us at www.springsinthedesert.org.

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