



The Patient Newsletter of the Center for Women's Reproductive Care at Columbia University

CWRC Celebrates 20 Years of IVF – See Page 4

Making Sense of Success Rates



Dr. Mark Sauer,
Program Director

When you're seeking infertility treatment, it's only natural to select providers you feel will help improve your chances for success. Many patients seek recommendations from trusted doctors and friends and interview providers to learn more. Most people also check a practice's overall success rates, on file with the Center for Disease Control (CDC), as a way to measure a practice's effectiveness. Unfortunately, that's where people often reach faulty conclusions.

Comparing success rates between different programs can be very misleading. Each practice has its own unique criteria for which cases it will accept. For example, some programs limit in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment to younger patients and to those with normal ovarian response, and decline more challenging cases. Not surprisingly, these providers also often obtain higher average success rates as a result of their patient selection.

Other practices do accept more challenging cases and, as you might expect, their overall success rates will be lower. These programs are often just as effective in providing high returns for the more "normal" population of infertile women. But when their "normal" cases are combined with the challenging cases, overall success rates can be deflated.

So how should a patient make sense of success rates? How can you know which practice will best address your needs?

Different cases have different rates of success

The Center for Women's Reproductive Care (CWRC) recently completed an in-depth study of our cases performed in 2001 to better understand success rates for different patient populations. As a practice committed to accepting challenging cases, our policy is to consider all people seeking care as long as we see a reasonable chance of success. And indeed, the audit confirmed that over a quarter of our patients are challenging cases. Even

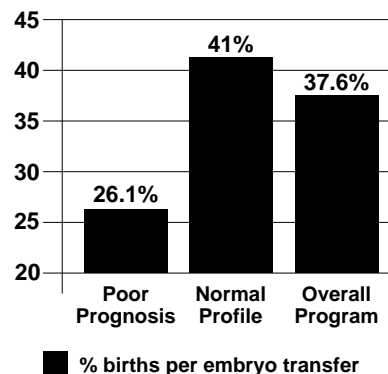
many of our youngest patients (under 35) are high-risk patients.

Many of our high-risk patients were refused IVF by other infertility practices and were advised they had no therapeutic option but to use donor eggs. Yet 26% of these challenging cases, or

(continued,
page 3)

CWRC 2001 Patients Treated with IVF (Under Age 35)

Comparison of live birth rates: rates by prognosis vs. overall rates



Overall program rates mask the success and failure of both poor prognosis patients (n=23) and women with a normal response (n=78) as reflected in reviewing women under 35 years of age undergoing in vitro fertilization. Data taken from the 2001 CDC reported tallies for CWRC.

Also In This Issue

- 2 Succeeding Against the Odds
- 2 A Team Approach to Care
- 3 Making Sense of Success Rates, continued
- 4 Helping You Choose A Treatment Plan
- 4 Celebrating 20 Years of IVF
- 4 New CWRC Research

A Team Approach to Care



CWRC
Social Workers
Randi Coun,
Tara Foley and
Joy Meyers

Anyone dealing with infertility understands the emotional challenges of therapy. Managing the ups and downs of treatment can be just as difficult as navigating tests and procedures. That's why the three social workers at CWRC act as a team to help patients through each stage of this process.

As patients enter the practice, Admissions Counselor Randi Coun, CSW is on hand to answer questions and provide short term counseling for patients experiencing excessive stress. "If a person needs to talk on the spur of the moment or wants to come in for a few scheduled visits, part of my job is to help them get through a crisis," says Randi. If longer-term counseling is needed, she can help by making referrals to mental health care providers at the University or other local medical centers.

For patients exploring egg donation, Egg Donor Coordinator Tara Foley, CSW provides information, assistance and a warm sounding board to help them through the process. Egg donation requires special attention to emotional and psychosocial issues, and Tara can put the experience in context and lend a friendly ear.

And since infertility treatment is a complicated, multi-step process, communication problems can arise from time to time. To make the whole treatment experience as easy as possible, Patient Relations Coordinator Joy Meyers, MSW is available to smooth out kinks that come up. Whether that's by helping resolve concerns with nursing, billing, scheduling appointments or any other areas, Joy is a dedicated advocate and ally, committed to supporting each person's journey. Joy is also responsible for developing support groups and a mentoring program for CWRC families. To learn more or to express interest in participating in these new programs, just contact Joy at 1-646-756-3876.

Having three social workers to address the variety of non-medical issues arising from treatment is essential to CWRC's success. Randi puts it this way, "you need a doctor to deliver the medical treatment, a staff dedicated to billing for help with finances, and social services to give patients someone to talk to who understands the emotional needs. All of these aspects of care really define a patient's experience."

If you have questions or would like to speak with Ms. Coun about the practice, contact CWRC: 1-646-756-8294

Succeeding Against the Odds

A recent patient—we'll call her Betty—came to CWRC for a second opinion after visiting a local infertility specialist. Betty was a 33-year-old woman with infertility since age 31, and was known to have an elevated follicle stimulating hormone level (FSH) of 21 mIU/ml, often a sign of lower ovarian reserve.

Betty's prior infertility provider advised that her only hope of becoming pregnant was through egg donation, which Betty did not wish to pursue. Upon evaluation at the Center, we found she indeed had an elevated FSH level of 15, and her husband also demonstrated a very abnormal semen analysis with only 1% normal forms.



The Center's staff discussed the challenging prognosis with the couple at length, at which point they elected to attempt a cycle of IVF. Using a maximum dose of medication, Betty was able to produce eight eggs, of which five fertilized using ICSI, yielding 3 embryos of excellent quality.

The embryos were then transferred, which went smoothly and resulted in a successful pregnancy. Follow-up examinations confirmed

Betty was carrying a normal, single fetus. In a happy end to the couple's journey, the pregnancy proceeded uneventfully, and Betty delivered a healthy eight-pound girl.

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Making Sense of Success Rates,

continued from page 1

one out of four of our high-risk patients in 2001, went on to deliver babies using their own eggs, thanks to our flexible admission policy.

CWRC's commitment to serving challenging cases gives more people the chance to pursue treatment. However, this policy will also tend to impact our overall success rates. The review of our 2001 cases found that our delivery rate for more typical infertility patients under 35 was 41%, or about two-in-five patients. However, our success rate for challenging cases was 26%, or one-in-four patients. And that caused the overall 2001 success rate for the entire program to fall to 37.6%.

Why does CWRC specialize in challenging cases?

As a non-profit, academic practice, we think all patients deserve the opportunity to access care if there is a reasonable chance of success. Accepting challenging cases is our way of demonstrating our commitment to this principle.

In addition, every physician at CWRC is a salaried, full-time faculty member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. As faculty members, they are required to maintain excellence in three different areas: outstanding clinical care, innovative research and superlative teaching. Treating a wide range of patients is an important part of achieving excellence in all three areas.



CONTACT

THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE CARE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

1790 Broadway at Columbus Circle, New York, NY 10019
1-646-756-8282

**The Center is offering one-time introductory fees:
\$6,950 for IVF Cycle***

Insurance accepted upon verification:
Aetna/US Healthcare, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield,
Cigna, HealthNet, Oxford, GHI and United Healthcare.
Patient financing is also available.

**For more information call
1-646-756-8294**

**Or visit our Web site:
www.columbiafertility.org**

*Introductory prices do not include:
required screening before beginning a cycle or if required as part of the cycle,
medications, assisted hatching, micromanipulation/ICSI or cryopreservation.
Offer available through December 31, 2004.

Q&A With the Center's Medical Staff

What factors influence success with IVF?

A woman's age, her day two-to-three serum FSH and estradiol levels, and the number of eggs produced when using fertility medications are the usual factors considered in determining eligibility and potential for success with IVF.

What are CWRC's admission criteria?

We offer infertility therapies for all cases that we believe have a valid chance of achieving pregnancy. For example, we will consider challenging cases, including those for whom age, past cycles, medical history or a FSH level above 12 mIU/ml indicate a lesser chance of success.



Does this flexible admission policy have a downside?

For some patients, having the opportunity to keep trying also brings the risk of disappointment. Although roughly one quarter of our challenging cases end in pregnancy, an encouraging statistic, about three-quarters do not. Eventually, many patients must decide to stop, and that can be a devastating reality.

What resources do you provide to help?

We have three social workers, in addition to a nursing and physician staff focused on providing emotional support. We encourage couples to hope for success, but to stop trying or take a break from treatment if failing becomes too great an emotional or financial burden.

CENTER SPOTLIGHT ON...

Helping You Choose A Treatment Plan



*Dr. Suzanne Kavic
Director of CWRC's
Egg Donation Program*

As with any medical procedure, it can be hard to know which IVF options to pursue. Many times, egg donation is required to address age-related intractable infertility. Both an OB/GYN and Reproductive Endocrinologist and Infertility specialist, Dr. Kavic not only directs CWRC's Egg Donation Program, she also counsels patients regarding which treatment plan is most appropriate for them.

"The only way to counsel couples is to be straightforward and honest. I

conduct a lengthy interview and consider their test results. We discuss pregnancy rates, review how long the couple has been trying and talk about their feelings," Dr. Kavic explains. "For patients facing lower chances of pregnancy due to age or circumstance, much of the discussion is about biological factors.

I tell couples we're happy to help if they want to try with their own eggs, as long as they're aware of the lower chance of success, and as long as their work-ups don't indicate that they won't respond to treatment."

"For me, an important part of the first meeting is listening to people express their feelings. I try to be informative and supportive so they can speak freely and feel they're a part of the decision-making."

Providing compassionate and honest advice is a high priority for everyone at CWRC. In addition to Dr. Kavic, patients can talk to CWRC social worker Tara Foley for support as they go through egg donation (*see related article on p. 2*). In fact, Dr. Kavic says "I encourage patients to feel they can voice their feelings with everyone from the outer office to nurses and doctors."

"That's something I really appreciate here. The whole staff understands the challenges of treatment. Walking people through it and making the experience easier is an important part of our job."

For more on Dr. Kavic, visit our Web site: www.columbiafertility.org

Celebrating 20 Years of IVF

This year, the IVF program at Columbia University marked its 20th anniversary, making CWRC the oldest IVF program in New York. We are very proud to have led the field, and especially to have helped so many families in the last two decades. In our convenient location at Columbus Circle, we look forward to a third decade of delivering trend-setting, patient-focused care.

To learn more about the IVF program at CWRC, visit www.columbiafertility.org

To make an appointment call: 1-646-756-8294 or -8282



New CWRC Research and Grants

CWRC has recently received three prestigious grants:

- *Serono Laboratories Inc.* has given Dr. Sauer a grant to study a new drug for stimulating follicular development and ovulation in infertile women.
- *The National Institutes of Health* awarded Dr. Zimmerman a grant for his research on new blood vessel formation and its effect on ovarian function.
- *The New York State Department of Health* gave CWRC a grant to participate in its Infertility Demonstration Program to treat those without IVF coverage.