

# No baby yet . . .

## Treatment helps some couples eventually conquer infertility

By Randy Malat  
Of the Emerald

Infertility is a fact of life for as many as one in six couples.

But while the number of infertile couples is estimated at one-sixth, medical advances in the last decade can solve this problem for 50 percent of the couples who undergo proper testing and treatment.

The treatment process may take several years to allow a couple to produce a baby. In the meantime, the emotional and social side effects of infertility can be trying, say two Eugene marriage counselors, Wendy Maltz and Nancy Evergreen.

The two counselors have started Infertility Support Services, the first such support group in town, to provide answers to questions about infertility and emotional support for those who must adjust to it.

"Infertility has been a real hush-hush kind of topic," Maltz says. "People have tended to suffer alone in silence with it. It's not the kind of topic you bring up at a dinner party. It has a history of being a negative reflection on an individual. But it's not. It's a medical problem."

Maltz says a traditional belief was that if God looked favorably upon people, he granted them children. She says God's supposed displeasure with childless couples was one source of the stigma people still associate with infertility.

The stigma also "had something to do with the woman's role as a bearer of children, that she could prove her worth that way. A long time ago a woman who couldn't have children was abandoned for someone who could," Maltz says.

Both of these social concepts are antiquated today, Maltz says. Infertility, in at least 90 percent of all cases, is a biological problem. And women play much broader roles than just childbearers.

Maltz and Evergreen recommend the book "Infertility: A Guide for the Childless Couple," by Barbara Eck Menning for information about infertility.

The book includes information on:

- What causes infertility — 40 percent of the couples are in-

fertile due to the woman's disorder, 40 percent due to the man's, and 20 percent shared.

- Myths that infertility can be psychological problem or a sexual disorder.

- The trend toward delayed marriage and childbearing and the resultant rise in infertility.

- The increasing sexual activity during adolescence, which increases a person's chances of contracting venereal disease, a major cause of infertility.

- The effects of VD on all age groups and negative side effects of birth control techniques and abortions.

For infertility testing and treatment, the man can contact an urologist and the woman can visit a gynecologist, the counselors say.

Maltz and Evergreen offer counseling and help people contact others experiencing the same problem to help solve emotional problems caused by infertility.

"Counseling can help develop the communication skills couples need to help them make it through the problem," Maltz says.

The counselors are trying to change attitudes about this common problem.

"One of the hardest parts about infertility is having people tiptoe around you. Don't treat infertile people like they're fragile, because they're not. We're stronger when people treat us stronger," says Evergreen.

"Find out from them if they want to talk about it," Maltz says. "Some people may want to talk about it, and others may want to go into hiding for six months and then talk about it. One might need a big cry, and another might read a medical journal. But both will reach the same acceptance eventually."

Counseling can inform couples of the alternatives to biological parenting, such as sperm banks, adoptions, test-tube pregnancies, in vitro fertilization and surrogate mothers.

Maltz says it's important for people to realize that "mothering, fathering and parenting are aspects of living that go far beyond whether one's reproductive organs are functioning to their full capacity."

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