



MEDICAL EXCELLENCE AND COMPASSIONATE CARE: BEST PRACTICES IN REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE

The field of reproductive medicine has changed dramatically over the past decades and remarkable improvements in patient outcomes have been realized. The chances of achieving a successful pregnancy were once fairly low, but a couple walking in for infertility treatment today is now likely to walk out with a healthy baby.

Recent studies have shown that the majority of patients who drop out of treatment do so because of frustration, anxiety, and disappointment, rather than cost. In an attempt to increase patient satisfaction, some physicians have unfortunately confused patient-friendly care with minimalist care and have diminished the use of fertility medications. This is neither evidenced based nor inherently accurate. Such care considers fewer patient tests, injections, and office visits as new metrics—instead of optimal pregnancy rates. While a minimalist approach may sound appealing, all too often it is not in our patients' best interests.

Patient-friendly care should instead feature early referral to a specialist and care that is compassionate and scientifically proven at every stage. Given the additional training, expertise, and seven-day availability of most fertility clinics—as well as the psychological and emotional support that is available—early referral will most often lead to a quicker and more seamless return of a happy, pregnant patient. Targeted testing and high-quality laboratory techniques have been shown to minimize the financial, emotional, and physical costs of treatment.

As fertility clinics pushed to improve success rates a decade ago, there emerged a trend to transfer more embryos, leading to a dramatic and unfortunate increase in higher-order multiple gestations with corresponding perinatal morbidity and even mortality. The definition of patient friendly must

therefore encompass treatments that ensure the birth of a healthy baby, which should most often be a singleton—not a twin or higher-order multiple gestation.

The Mount Sinai Medical Center's IVF (in vitro fertilization) program has made lowering multiple gestations a priority, incorporating technical advances that include culturing embryos for five days rather than three, and analyzing the embryonic genome in a rapid and reliable fashion. Our scientific team has also investigated and participated in innovative methods of evaluating the 35-microliter culture media surrounding the embryo for biomarkers, using a variety of proteomic and metabolomic technologies to identify the embryo with the highest reproductive competence to assist in picking out the best embryo(s) for transfer.

Equally important, ideal patient care, patient satisfaction, and patient-friendly IVF begin and end with a dialogue between the reproductive endocrinologist and obstetrician/gynecologist. Mount Sinai's interdisciplinary approach maintains that compassionate care, along with appropriate pre-conceptual testing, is essential to achieve the best possible outcome the majority of the time.

Technology has changed our field dramatically over the last century of medicine, but patient-friendly care has hardly changed at all. In addition to outcome-based metrics, it must incorporate the kindness and compassion that should be the hallmark of all patient care and medical treatment.

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