



The IVF experience

A patient perspective

David Rawlings



In order to help us better understand our patients' experiences, *Australian Family Physician* is pleased to introduce the second in a series of articles written by people who are willing to share their stories. David Rawlings was nominated by ACCESS to write this article.

I remember the day that we knew our IVF cycle had failed. We had been desperately trying to keep a lid on our expectations. We knew that the odds were against us but we had been waiting 4 years for a child and any glimmer of light – however small – could have been the end of a very dark time for us. For the first time ever, albeit with some outside help, my wife was pregnant.

The phone call came through. It was my wife. The red flag of failure had come again and the two tiny embryos – our children – had not survived. That same day, a client rang me to chase up a project he had been waiting on. It was delayed – partly due to the fact that I couldn't think straight due to the complicated cloud that infertility had turned our life into. The client chewed me out for the delay, which would have added 24 hours to a 2 week project – 24 hours; my mind was on four long years. Professionalism stopped me from really saying what was on my mind: 'I really don't give a **** about your project. My two children died this morning'.

When you're struggling to have a child, it can seem like few people understand what you're going through. People with well meaning comments of: 'Just relax and I'm sure it will happen' or 'can't get it up mate?' end up doing more damage than good. Friends who want to share the joy of their own new arrival find barriers that they cannot understand or surmount.

Infertility is one of life's great curveballs. You rarely question your fertility (unless you know about an existing condition) until doubts start to

raise their heads. In fact, most of our early adulthood is spent trying not to get pregnant.

We had done everything by the book. My wife and I been married for a number of years, strengthened our relationship, had made a sizeable dent in the mortgage, pushed ahead with careers and bought a big enough home for a family. We were ready for a family. Six months of unsuccessful 'trying' passed. My wife went to her general practitioner and was reassured that the 6 months we waited was not the abyss she had imagined. Despite our friends seemingly falling pregnant at the drop of a hat, we had another 6 months of trying before we should be concerned. So she sent us back to the bedroom for another 6 months.

My wife filled up on just about every book on fertility she could find and would often quote all types of experts who gave the advice that we needed to have a family. None of it worked. So we tried other things – organic diets, regimented sex schedules and seemingly every old wives' tale in the book. Still my wife was upset – and getting more upset by the month. And then she mentioned that we may need to think about IVF.

It's very difficult for a man when you invite the medical fraternity into your bedroom. How many men enjoy going to the doctor, let alone when they have to go to one to prove they are a man or not? It can be quite emasculating sitting in a white, clinical doctor's office, discussing with another man how to get your wife pregnant. Suddenly, your hopes, dreams and future as a family is contained in one small

white folder with your wife's name on it... not yours. And then you have to provide the sample; a very, very small specimen bottle whose contents are tested and scored.

We were fortunate. The medical people around us were caring and considerate. The doctors and nursing staff who joined our quest to have a family understood the sensitive nature of our search and really tried to treat it accordingly. Organisations such as ACCESS also provided information that put our experience into perspective and made us aware that there were others also going through the same things we were.

Since our experience, I have written a book to help men cope with IVF. I have spoken to dozens of men going through a time of infertility and found they were not as fortunate as us. Their doctors berated them for worrying, or joined clinic programs where the husband was treated like an outsider to the whole process.

Sadly, the lack of understanding many men face during the IVF experience extends to their doctors: the one group of people who perhaps could help them the best.

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For more information contact ACCESS:
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