



My Most Memorable Moment

Reminding Us of Our Purpose

Mark P. Trolice, MD



The patient and her husband had tried for many years to have a biologically-related, healthy child.

They had already adopted two children several years ago. But as the patient approached

age 43 years, she wanted to make one more attempt at childbearing. After many fertility specialists told her that she could not succeed, she presented to me for a consultation.

In addition to advanced reproductive age, the patient's challenges included a congenital absence of both the left portion of her uterus (unicornuate uterus) and left ovary, multiple uterine leiomyomata, and her husband's severely low sperm count. Nevertheless, she realized her dream when she delivered a healthy daughter after in vitro fertilization (IVF), becoming the oldest patient I had successfully assisted.

Two years later, the patient returned to add another child to her family. Refusing to yield to her biologic ovarian aging, she experienced several unsuccessful IVF attempts. Her sustained resilience and determination were uplifting, and I began sharing my personal fertility challenges with her.

At the time, I was also in the midst of pursuing an adoption after 10 years of my own struggle with infertility. When my wife and I received our daughter, I became even more focused on helping others. So, despite the statistics, I was determined to

assist every infertile patient in her struggle based on her wishes and understanding of her prognosis.

This patient was not interested in egg donation, so she began a final IVF cycle at age 46 years. If successful, she would again become the oldest patient I had assisted. From the start of the cycle, she experienced her best response to medication, while her husband uncharacteristically demonstrated a normal sperm count.

When her pregnancy test results were positive, we were all overjoyed.

For the first several weeks of her pregnancy, the patient's hormone levels appeared consistent with normal progress. However, at an estimated gestational age of 7 weeks, ultrasonography revealed a delay of several weeks. The pregnancy did not continue

past 6 weeks. Truly devastated, this loving couple elected to undergo a procedure to remove the nonviable fetus.

On the days preceding the dilation and curettage, the patient was very anxious, calling our office repeatedly to ask "why did this happen?" She finally requested genetic analysis of the embryo to determine the cause. On the morning of the procedure, she seemed to be at peace with her decision.

I met the patient in the preoperative area, and immediately felt her pain. She held my

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hand and gestured for all of the other personnel to leave. She was shaking and crying, upset about the staff behaving in an impersonal manner. All I could do was continue to hold her hand and listen with empathy. I finally excused myself to bring her husband into the area so I could prepare for the procedure.

Although the patient's uterus was abnormally large due to fibroids, the surgery proceeded without difficulty. As usual, I

visited her immediately afterward to assess her pain. I approached her stretcher and placed my hands on the guard rail. Without speaking, she slowly bent to kiss my right hand—the same hand that had just removed her “dream” child from her uterus.

I recall that day on a daily basis, particularly when times become hectic or troubling. The couple has moved on with their lives. Ironically, as I assisted them in healing, they showed me that success is not always measured in good outcomes. They reminded me of my ultimate purpose—to relieve suffering.

Share your *Most Memorable Moment* by writing to:

vivian.dickerson@qhc.com

OR

The Female Patient®

Attn: Vivian M. Dickerson, MD

7 Century Drive, Suite 302

Parsippany, NJ 07054-4609

Mark P. Trolice, MD, is director of Fertility C.A.R.E. (Center for Advanced Reproductive Endocrinology); and division director of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children & Women, Orlando, Fla.