

Braving the first step in assisted reproduction
by Tina Smith

****first article in 3-part series****

The room is warm and comfortable, but I shiver with nervousness.

Leafing through a magazine, I don't read a single word. Instead, I'm curious about others in the waiting area. Has she felt the same desperation as me? Is he baffled by infertility? Have they found an inkling of promise here or just another disappointing end? Seeing couples taking this step together makes me wish I'd made this appointment when my husband wasn't traveling.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine scheduling a consult at a fertility clinic. I hadn't even heard of a reproductive endocrinologist until a month ago. Today, I've blocked two hours of my day to meet the doctor who may be the key to my dream of motherhood finally coming true.

I was greeted by a friendly receptionist when I signed in and turned over my paperwork. I've written down some questions and concerns in case I get too distracted to remember what to ask. Now I wait until my name is called.

I follow a nurse who checks my blood pressure and height and doesn't roll her eyes when I take off my shoes before stepping on the scale. She escorts me to the doctor's office. I'm thankful not to be draped in a gaping gown or lying on an exam table. Something about sitting in an upholstered chair gives me confidence. I begin sharing my story, growing emotional at times when painful memories of disappointment and loss threaten to overwhelm me. The doctor listens and nods and asks questions.

Eventually, my tirade of facts and tears loses momentum. I begin to hear the doctor's recommendations for tests and procedures that can help target the source of my infertility as well as my husband's. Because of my history, the doctor asks if he can do an ultrasound scan today. He explains his suspicions about what's going on in my body and shares the steps he'd like to see me and my husband take.

As we continue talking, the doctor walks me down the hallway and introduces me to some of the clinical staff. I'm happy to meet members of the team who may be involved in our reproductive assistance. The faces are kind and sympathetic, offering encouragement and helpful information. I'm given a sample of prenatal vitamins to boost my fertility along with several tips to share with my husband. The doctor returns for my scan, which confirms the direction we'll go next.

On the way out, I meet the financial coordinator who explains the costs involved with procedures and tests. I'm surprised that my medical insurance will cover some of the expenses. Other resources are suggested, and I find myself again wishing that my husband was with me today.

I'm definitely overwhelmed -- information, unknowns, options. I'll need time to sort out everything. It's good to know I can call the office if I have questions or need help navigating the clinic's web site.

Will this new path end with parenthood? Only time will tell. But for the first time in along time, there's hope.

To be continued ...