Treatment strategies for subfertile couples

Dear Sir,

We read with interest the study of Gnoth et al. (2003) that reported fecundity in a cohort of 346 couples that stopped contraception with the aim to conceive. The study shows that 80% of the couples conceived within 6 months. From the remaining 20%, almost 60% conceived within the next 6 months. Although the data obtained by these authors are unique and of high quality, we firmly disagree with their interpretation when the authors propose a new threshold for a baseline fertility work-up after 6 months of unprotected intercourse.

First, there exists no test that can distinguish between normal fertile and subfertile couples. Although prediction models using a baseline fertility work-up can discriminate between couples with a high chance of treatment-independent conception and couples with a low chance, there is a huge overlap in test results between these couples (Eimers et al., 1994; Wichmann et al., 1994; Collins et al., 1995; Snick et al., 1997). The proposal of a first assessment at 6 months can only be made seriously if they show that the proposed tests can discriminate those who will conceive without treatment and those who will need treatment after a longer period.

Secondly, the treatment-independent conception rate of those couples that had not conceived after 6 months was almost 60%. This rate is superior to any other treatment strategy that is currently offered to subfertile couples. Any treatment with a success rate of more than 50% without any side effects and at no costs would be embraced as a breakthrough in fertility care. In their proposal, the authors suggest leaving such a strategy. Their proposal will harm couples with complications and multiple pregnancies as the result of overtreatment, at unnecessary costs.

References


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