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Treating Infertility with Chinese medicine has been recorded in our ancient texts and on the backs of turtle shells for thousands of years. Western medicine has been treating disease for a couple hundred years. Reproductive medicine is one of our newest sciences. The first “test tube” baby was born less than thirty years ago. Over the recent five years, some conclusions have been made regarding the utility of acupuncture in conjunction with assisted reproductive technology. These reports come directly out of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine’s Fertility & Sterility Journal:

- *TCM improves the fertilization rate in fresh cycles of IVF/ICSI.*
- *Implantation and “take-home baby” rates were significantly higher with electro-acupuncture than without.*
- *The results of this study support the significance of acupuncture for the outcome of IVF/ICSI.*
- *Acupuncture on the day of ET significantly improves the reproductive outcome of IVF/ICSI, compared with no acupuncture.*
- *Significant increases in pregnancy outcomes were confirmed by this study and the data uniquely supported the advantage of acupuncture in patients with normal (pelvic blood flow).*
- *Acupuncture seems to be a powerful tool to improve pregnancy rate in assisted reproduction therapy (ART).*
- *Conception and implantation rates were highest with traditional needle acupuncture. IVF treatment outcomes did not differ between patients treated with laser or sham laser acupuncture.*
- *Our study shows a significantly lower amount of gonadotropins used when IVF is combined with standard acupuncture. A 70% pregnancy rate was also achieved with standard acupuncture and IVF, compared to 25%.*
- *Preliminary data shows a statistically significant improvement in the biochemical pregnancy rate with acupuncture treatment. Additionally, acupuncture was associated with a strong trend towards higher clinical pregnancy rates and take home baby rates.*

Obviously, acupuncture is improving the sometimes dismal success rates of the high tech industry of reproductive medicine. How can this age-old medicine make such a difference? Let’s look at the science behind these studies, which reveals that:

(1) Acupuncture can increase blood flow to the reproductive organs, which dramatically improves a woman's response to the hormonal therapy.

(2) Acupuncture has been shown to regulate hormone levels by moderating the release of beta-endorphin levels in the brain, which improves the release of gonadotrophin releasing hormone by the hypothalamus, follicle stimulating hormone from the pituitary gland, and estrogen and progesterone levels from the ovary.

(3) Acupuncture reduces stress and a hyperactive sympathetic nervous system response.

(4) Acupuncture has been speculated to moderate cyclooxygenase and prostaglandin levels in the uterus, reducing uterine motility to improve implantation rates.

With all this "proof," you would think that every reproductive clinic in the world would require their patients to receive acupuncture. Yet, each of these studies quoted above, warns us that acupuncture is experimental, controversial, and still needs to subject itself to more double-blinded, placebo controlled studies to validate itself in reproductive medicine. And I have witnessed acupuncturists scurrying to make a name for themselves and our medicine in this high tech baby making business, applying biomedical acupuncture recipes, and pre-determined acupoint combinations that supposedly help their patients become parents. Reproductive medicine is demanding that we confine our complex methodology to the pre-established point combinations that they prescribe for us. And we are not allowed to sway from their rigid protocol to address the real underlying causes of the infertility the way we were taught. And, in fitting ourselves into the accepted western model, we are losing our own essence, too.

Yes, acupuncture improves the 'success rates' of IVF. But what is our intent as practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine? The Nei Jing tells us that before needling, we must be "rooted in spirit". The more rooted in spirit I become, the less I can confine my treatments to the double-blinded placebo controlled "truths" of the western medical model. We must consider the long-term implications of what we are doing. Reproductive medicine can sometimes force a pregnancy out of unhealthy egg and unhealthy sperm. It's exciting to feel a pregnancy pulse in someone who has never conceived before! Yet, it is no fun to treat women who have miscarried midway through the pregnancy, or delivered children with major birth defects because a pregnancy was forced into a body that couldn't support a healthy pregnancy. I have helped hundreds of women conceive with the help of assisted reproductive technology. There are many happy, 'success' stories. Yet, what about the women who have gone through dozens of IVF procedures with the help of acupuncture and still remain childless – now with the long term potentially devastating effects of ongoing hormonal stimulation? And in those who are "successful", I wonder how future generations will be impacted. I can no longer simply try to help people achieve pregnancies at all costs, without doing everything within my power to tonify their essence, and address the imbalances of their bodies, minds, and souls before they are ready to carry a child.

I know firsthand the agony of wanting a child and feeling like it is out of my reach. I know the science behind reproductive medicine. Yet, my experience shows me that we cannot outsmart nature. Now, more than ever, I believe it is especially important to remain true to the spirit of Chinese medicine, and the knowledge that we must work with nature, not against her. We treat human beings and their entire lives, not just uterus, ovaries, and sperm. We correct imbalances in the body, and help our patients become rooted in spirit. We can help remove obstructions to the creative life force. And as we move further

toward interfacing with assisted reproductive technology, let us remain true to the one energy, the flow of qi, the two polarities and five elements that make up life, the myriad patterns of imbalance, and help our patients say “yes” to life, nature’s way.

It is well established that we can help reproductive medicine improve their success rates. But let us not become their laboratory technicians. Going back to the science of IVF and TCM – would you like to know the point combinations the labs utilized to provide such powerful effects? Shenmen and PC 6 to calm the spirit. Lv 3 and LI4 to unblock the qi. Sp6 to balance the hormones, St 36 and Du20 to lift the qi; Sp8, Sp10, and St29 to move the blood, UB23 and UB28 to nourish the kidneys. Nothing fancy; these are principles with which we are all familiar. There are no magic points. The magic is in the way we perform our pattern diagnosis and treatment methods. Let’s not get caught up in the illusory trap of trying to catch up with the seduction of scientific medicine. Perhaps the art of Chinese medicine is already beyond the limitations of science. As Lau Tzu almost eerily predicted in the ancient Hua Hu Ching,

*If we remain obsessed with seeds and eggs,
We are married to the fertile reproductive valley
of the Mysterious Mother,
But not to her immeasurable heart
and all-knowing mind.*

I believe it is our duty to practice traditional Chinese medicine in the spirit in which it was meant to be practiced – to help the life force express itself in a state of balanced body, mind, and soul.

About the Author:

Randine Lewis is the founder of the international Fertile Soul™ clinics, retreats, lectures and workshops where she helps couples conceive through a revolutionary program for the body, mind, and spirit based upon traditional Chinese medicine. She is a governing board member of the American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine (ABORM); she has authored *The Infertility Cure, the Ancient Chinese Wellness Program for Getting Pregnant and Having Healthy Babies* (Little, Brown & Company, 2004), and *The Fertile Soul, Ten Ancient Chinese Secrets for Opening Up to the Creative Power of the Universe* (Simon & Shuster, 2007). For more information on Dr. Lewis’ work, please go to www.thefertilesoul.com.