

Health Profiles special advertising section

Infertility - Drs. Honea, Houserman and Long **A Work of ART is a Dream Fulfilled**



Photo by Melisa Springer

Imagine you have found the person with whom you want to share your life, and you are ready to start your family. After one year of attempting without success, you find out you will need infertility care. Approximately one in eight couples of childbearing age in the United States will find that they will be unable to conceive without help.

Infertility is often a frustrating and frightening experience. Understanding the facts of infertility can help. About 40 percent of couples experiencing infertility have a female factor, such as a problem with ovulation, tubal disease, endometriosis or cervical mucus. Another 40 percent of couples will have male factor infertility associated with low sperm count or motility, sperm antibodies or impaired sperm function. The third group of infertile couples has a combination of male and female factors.

While the individual needs of each couple are different, an effective, comprehensive approach to treating the problem will include a number of basic steps.

"The first step should be a detailed eval-

uation of all information regarding the possible cause or causes of infertility in the couple," states Dr. Kathryn Honea, Medical Director of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Program of Alabama. "A thorough gynecological exam is essential. An in-depth initial evaluation should assess medical history and begin collecting information regarding the couple's fertility parameters. After the evaluation process, a treatment plan is developed based on these factors. Fertility specialists can then recommend a wide range of corrective treatment or therapies, such as laser laparoscopy, microsurgery, ovulation induction, intrauterine insemination or non-surgical In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). For men who have blocked vas deferens, Testicular Sperm Aspiration (TESA) can be used in conjunction with IVF to achieve a pregnancy."

Even though infertility has been defined as a disease, many insurance companies do not offer infertility and/or IVF coverage. To make infertility care more accessible for patients who could be helped with IVF, the ART Program of Alabama developed the **Shared Risk Program**. The Shared Risk Program allows more patients to pursue medical care. Couples purchase an IVF package plan and receive a significant refund if they do not obtain an ongoing pregnancy through IVF. This allows the patient and

the Program to focus on the cost of having a baby rather than the cost of medical services. The ART Program shares the risk that the couple may not succeed.

The ART Program of Alabama, led by Dr. Honea, Dr. Virginia Houserman, and Dr. Cecil Long, has been providing these services for almost two decades. The Program features a complete treatment center in the Brookwood Medical Plaza along with satellite facilities in Huntsville and Montgomery. Their efforts have resulted in over 1,000 babies born through IVF, and thousands more with other assisted reproductive technologies.

Dr. Honea, Houserman and Long, all Board Certified specialists in reproductive endocrinology and infertility, coordinate the efforts of a support team of over 50 skilled professionals including nurses, nurse practitioners, and embryology and medical laboratory technologists. They focus on providing confidential, compassionate medical services, personal care, and counseling. Their cost-effective, state-of-the-art treatment procedures are designed to achieve the highest possible pregnancy rate.

An important point to remember is that help is available, but time is of the essence. A woman's fertility chances begin declining after about age 27. Women who are less than 35 years old are the best candidates for a successful pregnancy through these procedures.

"Many couples are referred to us by the woman's ob/gyn. Other couples seek our help after having tried and failed to produce a pregnancy. Some come to us when they are aware that one of both marriage partners have a condition that precludes a normal pregnancy," Dr. Houserman adds. "The worst thing that can happen is for a couple to delay accepting that they have infertility, and wait until it is too late."



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