

### **The Grief of Infertility**

**I am sure every woman believes that they can conceive a child with no problems at all. Most women would probably never suspect that they would have difficulties in this area. When it doesn't happen the long-term affects are devastating. Not being able to have your own baby affects all areas of your life.**

**As I am infertile I have first-hand knowledge of the devastation it can cause. I am 41 and have dealt with this all my adult life and have only just recently, with the help of professional counselling, come to that place of peace for which we all crave.**

**My story is that I was under a private gynaecologist in the late 1980's who basically told me that he didn't know what was wrong with me, so referred me on. The next man told me I had a choice of IVF with a donor egg, or adoption. As a donor was out of the question for us for many reasons we chose adoption, so all medical treatment ceased. Our adoption went through and we finally got our little boy from overseas but even though he is the absolute joy in our lives, it still doesn't take away the pain of not being able to have your own baby.**

**At this point in time, my story would probably be like many other stories you've heard. During my journey I have become continually frustrated with the lack of information on the grief of infertility and with nowhere to go for help. It seems that there is a vast amount of information on the medical factors relating to infertility, with support groups geared towards people going through IVF and acting as advocacy for patients. Many infertility books have the same emphasis. As you can appreciate this didn't help me at all. Having been under a private specialist there was no access to counselling staff. There was also no access to any services or support groups through the fertility clinics in my local small country towns. As I didn't go through IVF, medical information was not what I needed and there was nowhere to go for help.**

**Is there anywhere for people to go who have jumped off the medical merry-go-round? Are there support groups for people who are not going through IVF and even though we have a child by other means, still have issues relating to our infertility? We are not childless but we are still infertile! It seems to me that this area is not covered at all.**

**Then comes the next part of my story. I was referred to a specialist who just happened to work in a fertility clinic. I had gone there for a completely unrelated reason. During routine tests and with knowledge of my medical background, he told me that my original specialists knew what was wrong with me and the treatment required to help me conceive, but they hadn't revealed this to me. You can imagine my horror and devastation at this news. Nobody should have to go through this pain twice in their life! This time I did have immediate access to counselling staff for which I was grateful. I did, however, have to seek professional counselling to help me work through this.**

**It was after this second incidence that I wanted to become involved in a support group but found that it did not cater to my needs. There was a considerable lack of emphasis placed on looking at, working through and dealing with the long-term grief**

aspect of infertility. It almost seems as if the emotional support part of a support group is an afterthought and sometimes I wonder if people realise that they are going through a grief situation at all. I believe the grief of infertility needs to come to the fore so that people can better cope with the deep heartache that they feel.

Every group that I looked up on the Internet, not only in my own state but interstate as well, did not cater for what I needed. I was saddened to find out that the only support group in our state, Oasis, had folded. Yes, I believe that these support groups have a vital role to play, it is important to be kept up to speed with the latest technology in this area, to have support through the ups and downs whilst going through IVF but what about those who have stopped all medical intervention? Where do these people go for support and to know that they are not alone?

I feel very strongly and have a great concern that the addressing of the grief issues of infertility is seriously lacking. One can talk about infertility on a clinical level quite openly and freely but to start talking about feelings and working through the many issues that stem from this is still taboo.

I know that grief is extremely painful to talk about, but we need to be able to help people through this devastating and traumatic period in their lives. The emotional issues should be dealt with separately from the clinical issues involved. If we – those who experience infertility first-hand – have a 'stick-your-head-in-the-sand' mentality, then society will not be able to understand exactly what we are going through. This then becomes a vicious circle that somehow needs to be broken.

I have thought long and hard over these issues for many years before putting them in writing. I have written this letter from my own standpoint but there must be hundreds of women out there in a similar situation. Who are also not being reached and not finding the help that they need to enable them to work through their unresolved grief issues. The grief of infertility is an area in which I have a great interest in and concern for and would like to be involved with in the future and have already done some grief training towards this end.

I would greatly value your thoughts on what I have said. Any information you may have on hand that you could pass on to me on this subject would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and I look forward to hearing from you with anticipation.

L.S (SA)