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978-0-521-85363-7 - Infertility Counseling: A Comprehensive Handbook for Clinicians, Second Edition

Edited by Sharon N. Covington and Linda Hammer Burns

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INFERTILITY COUNSELING

Infertility Counseling: A Comprehensive Handbook for Clinicians, Second Edition, is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary textbook for all health professionals providing care for individuals facing reproductive health issues. It is the most thorough and extensive book currently available for clinicians in the field of infertility counseling, providing an exhaustive and comprehensive review of topics. It addresses both the medical and psychological aspects of infertility, reviewing assessment approaches, treatment strategies, medical counseling issues, third-party reproduction, alternative family building, and postinfertility counseling issues. Each chapter follows the same format: introduction, historical overview, literature review, theoretical framework, identification of clinical issues, suggestions for therapeutic interventions, and future implication. This edition also includes extensive appendixes of psychological and legal tools useful to all clinicians, including an Internet database of resources and an extensive glossary of terminology.

Sharon N. Covington is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, DC. She is also currently the Director of Psychological Support Services at Shady Grove Fertility Reproductive Science Center in Rockville, Maryland. A clinical social worker and psychotherapist for more than thirty years, she practices individual, couple, and group psychotherapy as well as the highly specialized area of infertility counseling.

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Infertility Counseling

A COMPREHENSIVE HANDBOOK FOR CLINICIANS SECOND EDITION

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For our husbands,
Barry Truitt Covington and Sheldon Robert Burns,

and our growing families,

Brendan Truitt Covington, Laura Stratford Covington,
Michelle Covington Harmon, Scott Newcomer Harmon;
and Sean Covington Harmon;
Evan Robert Burns, Alicen Burns Spaulding,
and Stephen Alan Parlin Spaulding.

You will always be the wind beneath our wings.

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Foreword

It is remarkable to see how much the specialty of infertility counseling has matured and established itself since the publication, just six years ago, of the first edition of this important book. I was privileged then, as I am again now, to write the Foreword for this textbook, which has become the standard of reference for the profession. As noted by the editors in their preface, the continuing enthusiasm that has welcomed this text both nationally and internationally has created the demand to bring all critical chapters up to today's leading edge of knowledge, as well as to add several relevant and important new ones in this second edition.

Today, with the continued rapid advances in the assisted reproductive technologies, there is a much clearer recognition of the psychosocial issues that may arise over the course of treatment for infertile patients as well as the critical role played in their management by mental health professionals. Infertility counseling has become an indispensable adjunct to the practice of reproductive medicine, particularly in those countries at the forefront of new developments in the field. It is gratifying to see that over recent years, infertility counseling has gained appropriate recognition on an even broader international level, which is addressed in depth in Chapter 31, Global Perspectives on Infertility Counseling. Of note has been the collegial networking internationally among national counseling organizations and mental health professionals that ultimately led to the formation of an international association, the International Infertility Counseling Organization (IICO). IICO continues to grow and evolve, and currently it is made up of national organizations from ten countries. IICO has a liaison with the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) and also meets regularly in conjunction with the annual meetings of

other major infertility organizations, such as the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). Within its educational mission, IICO provides postgraduate courses with national and international congresses as well as symposia, workshops, and social gatherings. These efforts generate informative dialogue among both medical and mental health professionals concerning critical legislation and regulations in other countries, practice guidelines, credentialing of mental health professionals, research on the psychosocial aspects of infertility and medical treatment outcomes, and creating standards of practice in infertility counseling worldwide.

All infertility professionals are indebted to coeditors Sharon N. Covington, MSW, and Linda Hammer Burns, PhD, as well as their distinguished contributing authors for making this textbook as complete and comprehensive as it is, covering the breadth and scope of the field. This new second edition will, ultimately, make it possible to provide superior clinical care for all patients worldwide. Not only have the editors provided an invaluable service to their discipline by fostering this important text, but they both continue to provide strong leadership in medical organizations at both the national and international levels. Linda Hammer Burns has played an indispensable role in organizing IICO and is currently its chair. Sharon Covington has been equally active as a founding member of the Mental Health Professional Group (MHPG) of ASRM, serving on many ASRM committees, including the Society of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (SART) Executive committee and as chair, along with Linda Hammer Burns, of the MHPG of the ASRM. Both have contributed their expertise through contributions to other professional texts and as reviewers for respected journals in the

field, in addition to their mentoring of mental health professionals and clinicians new to the field of reproductive health counseling.

I have known and admired them both for many years, going back to the time when I was editor-in-chief of *Fertility and Sterility* and it was my pleasure to be able to publish a number of Sharon Covington’s important juried scientific contributions, as well as calling on both as reviewers. Through their tireless efforts and devotion to excellence, both have distinguished themselves in

advancing their field and helping to establish infertility counseling as an indispensable discipline in the integrated care of infertility patients.

This book will benefit all who read it. As I wrote in my previous Foreword, it is designed for serious students and practitioners of infertility counseling. It will be a valuable resource text for medical libraries and will grace the personal libraries of mental health professionals, students of reproductive medicine, clinicians, and educators alike.

Roger D. Kempers
February, 2006

Preface

Writers are really people who write books not because they are poor, but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like.
– Walter Benjamin

When we wrote (edited) the first edition of this book, our motivation was simple and straightforward: to provide a definitive textbook on infertility counseling. We had worked in the field for a number of years, nurtured its growth and development as a professional specialty, and mentored many entering the field, yet there was no single, scholarly text for professionals. So, with this simple idea the original text was born. Little did we realize the impact it would have on the profession of infertility counseling, the field of reproductive medicine, or on us, both professionally and personally. We are still amazed when we hear (as we have many times) people around the world refer to it as ‘the purple bible.’ This text is not an updated version of the original book, as is often the case, but a new book entirely that offers updated versions of each chapter as well as several new topics. This is not to say we did not think all of the topics from the original book were not important or relevant, but only that limits of space necessitated a reshuffling. As such, the original text will remain relevant and the new one of equal and parallel importance.

Since the first edition was published, the profession of infertility counseling has evolved and so have our own professional perspectives. One of the most significant changes has been the development of an international perspective on infertility counseling. This has been triggered by our own travel instincts (and Linda’s predilection for visiting infertility clinics wherever she travels) but also interest in our textbook that has brought us contacts, questions, and requests for consultations from around the world. Recognizing this, Linda spearheaded the formation of the International Infertility Counseling Organization (IICO) – with the support and helpful guidance of Sharon who was a founding member of the Mental Health Professional Group of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine. Although IICO continues to experience (as all new organizations) growing

pains, it has been successful in bringing together professionals from around the world, providing educational opportunities and a mechanism for professional collaboration, and fostering the development of new infertility counseling societies. Dr. Roger Kempers, who was so very helpful during his tenure at ASRM and supportive of our first book, has been equally, if not more, helpful in the development of IICO in his position as chair of the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS). We owe him a special debt of gratitude not only for his professional and personal support, but for his unyielding validation of the professional development of infertility counseling and a collaborative approach to treatment of infertile patients in acknowledging the importance of psychosocial aspects of infertility.

It was not particularly surprising, as such, when our ever loyal editor, Nat Russo, approached us with his usual enthusiasm and insistence about updating the original text but with a more international perspective. Although we willingly embraced the idea, little did we realize then how this new approach would exponentially complicate the project, creating new and unique challenges for us – as well as our contributors.

To our contributors who met these challenges with varying degrees of dread and/or excitement, we owe a very special thank you. All are respected (and busy) professionals in their own right and their efforts here are exceptional. We appreciate each of them for their professional expertise, effort, and time. A special thanks to those who provided extra doses of personal encouragement and kindness – especially when our own spirits or stamina waned. Many of the contributors have played significant roles in the professional development of infertility counseling worldwide and continue to do so through an array of professional activities. While many contributors were authors in the first edition, some are new to this volume and, as such, faced

unanticipated hurdles and problems. Despite the distinct trials and travails of this edition, we wish to express our appreciation for each author’s willingness to contribute their expertise and knowledge and for their patience and tolerance of our suggestions, critiques, and ‘improvements’ of their work. Although we realize we have become rather notoriously exacting editors (applying the same exacting standards to our own work), we hope (and think) that despite our often rigorous demands, we have kept their friendships and they are well aware of our very deep appreciation.

As before, we must also thank our respective practices and colleagues. Over the years, Sharon has seen her practice expand at Shady Grove Fertility Reproductive Science Center from one office, one doctor, and five staff members, to one of the largest practices in the United States with eight offices, eighteen physicians, and more than 250 employees . . . and still growing. The list of all the important people at Shady Grove who have helped and supported me along the way is too extensive to include, yet a few (though not exclusively) stand out: Dr. Robert Stillman, Dr. Michael Levy, Dr. Eric Widra, and Dr. Arthur Sagoskin for helping me define the collaborative reproductive healthcare model through their respect and belief in psychological services (and me); and nurses Karen Moore, Kathy Bugge, and Michele Purcell for their exceptional skill, compassion, and encouragement in our work together over the years. Just as important are the extraordinary group of clinical social workers who have joined me in my practice – Patricia Sachs, Carol Toll, Ellen Eule, Erica Hanson, Michelle Hester, and Carol Miller. They have been patient with me throughout this revision, picked up extra work without complaint, always kept their good nature despite my distraction, and continued to remind me of the importance of this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Larry Nelson at the National Institutes of Health for giving me the opportunity to work on his research team, and for his commitment to the psychological needs of women struggling with premature ovarian failure. Special appreciation goes to Nancy Hafkin, PhD, my friend of more than forty years and cotherapist for more than twenty, for helping (and putting up with) me throughout this process with patience, humor, and when needed, clinical interpretation. Thanks, also, to Linda Applegarth, EdD, who was a personal friend before we began to share the journey in our professional careers of infertility counseling and whose understanding and support have been so important to me along the way. I feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to do work that I love with people that I love working with.

Linda has remained at the University of Minnesota Medical School, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Women’s Health, and the Reproductive Medicine Center. Although he is retired now, special thanks will always be owed to Dr. George Tagatz, who decades ago offered me a job and allowed me to design and implement an infertility counseling program that became an integral part of patient care and the model and impetus for this book. Dr. Theodore (Ted) Nagel was there that day when Dr. Tagatz asked (on behalf of both of them), “Linda, how would you like to work here?” And despite the vicissitudes of our respective careers, we are both still here – in large part due to Dr. Nagel’s determined refusal to allow either of us to retire – even when it seemed like a good idea. Over the years, I have come to appreciate not only his professional mentoring but his quick wit, extraordinary intelligence, and personal kindness. He has, more than any other colleague, tolerated my big ideas (even when skeptical) and supported my various other commitments and interests without complaint – and more often than not, offered his own ideas and insights. In addition, there are other professionals including physicians, nurses, and secretarial staff who have, over the decades, provided rewarding and edifying professional as well as personal relationships. These include, but, of course, are not limited to, Dr. Mark Damario; Bonnie Le Roy, MS; Mary Ahrens, MS; Selina Blatz, NP; Mary Danich, NP; Rosie Drechnik, NP; Deb Pearo, RN; Neda Tasson, RN; Rachel Radman; and Kim Hockett. In addition, I owe a very special debt of gratitude to colleague, mentor, and friend Sue V. Petzel, PhD. She has been there from the very beginning as an exceptionally talented mentor and colleague who I not only appreciate but respect immensely. Now, after years of astutely avoiding the field of infertility counseling, she too has become intrigued with the field and the fascinating patients we assist. A simple thank you is really inadequate and, as such, it is my hope that she is well aware of how grateful I am for her professional guidance and personal friendship. Finally, I feel especially privileged and blessed to have had a career that has been so intellectually stimulating and professionally rewarding and has allowed me to work with colleagues who not only gave me respect and support, but an enjoyable camaraderie.

As we continue to practice as infertility counselors, we realize that it is our patients who have provided us with the clinical experience and expertise to enable us to contribute to this field through professional development and writing. As such, we owe a special debt of gratitude to our patients, both past and present. In

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their suffering and resilience they taught us, and from their pain and transcendence we learned. We feel honored and privileged to have been included in their journeys through infertility, pregnancy loss, childlessness, and for many, eventual parenthood. We are who we are today and who we have become (personally and professionally) because of these special clients, and this project (as with the previous book) would have been impossible without them.

It goes without saying that we are grateful to our families to whom we are not simply indebted – we are probably overdrawn! Through the journey of this book, we have seen the birth of Sharon’s first grandchild and the marriage of Linda’s daughter – in the same month! Throughout the usual family transitions, personal and family crises, professional challenges, and daily hassles, our families have helped us keep our equilibrium (sometimes tenuously) with their steadfast love and support. Once again, our children offered generous assistance – even though they are now young adults with lives of their own and live (most of them) at some distance. Again, our children were our computer experts (not only for us but for our contributors), research assistants, secretarial staff, and general *aides-de-camp*. We wrote through wedding plans, baby preparations, babysitting, computer crashes, cross-country relocations, and natural disasters with our single-minded determination, creating only slight (albeit justified) grumbles. Our husbands, despite their own crises and challenges, have never wavered in their support of our work and this project, providing limitless encouragement and comfort. More than anyone else, they have borne the brunt of the stressful challenges of this book, tolerating our self-imposed work schedules, including working during vacations, filling in on a myriad of responsibilities that

we were forced to relinquish, and yet still they always supplied us with kindness, love, and a sense of humor – particularly when our spirits lagged or our nerves were frayed. Once again, this book is dedicated to our very special husbands and families including our newest members, because it could never have happened without their blessing, love, and hard work, in addition to our own.

Finally, we must thank each other. It was Sharon who noted that twice in her life she had “married someone I hardly knew” – once personally and once professionally – and both times it has led to exceptional, long-lasting ‘marriages.’ Our collaboration and collaborative abilities continue to mystify even us. Although we often felt at the end of our tethers and overwhelmed by the work, we never felt that way with each other. We have never disagreed or had a different vision of what this book could or should be. Somehow, despite both positive and negative stressors in our personal and professional lives, we were able to remain focused and working – usually due to large doses of humor and Sharon’s ever present reminder to ‘just breathe.’ The qualities that helped us through the first book (communication, intelligence, good humor, and work ethic) have also made this book possible. And as before, we not only learned to appreciate each other more, but we also learned a great deal about ourselves. For its own unique reasons, this book *was* more challenging than the last, yet also more rewarding. In the end, we are not only appreciative and proud of the work we have produced here, but of the friendship and collaboration that enabled it.

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