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Edited by Sharon N. Covington  
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# Fertility Counseling

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## Clinical Guide and Case Studies

Edited by

**Sharon N. Covington**

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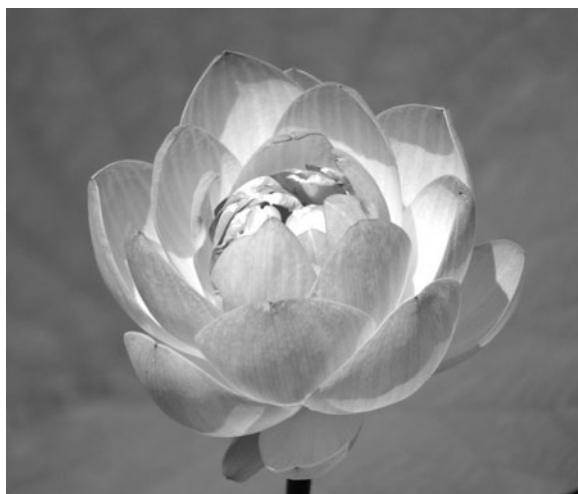
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*Family, like a lotus, may struggle to grow, pushing through murkiness before reaching the light and, then, blossom into unique beauty and strength.*



Dedicated to:

My patients who have allowed me the honor to share in their struggle through the murkiness of infertility and witness their growth.

My husband, Barry, and our growing family: Laura, Brendan, Darlene and Luke Covington; and Michelle, Scott, Sean, Michaela and Liam Harmon.

*Lotus photo by Michelle Covington Harmon, used with permission*

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Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Contents

*List of contributors*    page ix  
*Foreword*    xi  
Alan DeCherney and Dorothy Greenfeld  
*Acknowledgments*    xii

Section 1: Introduction

1 **Collaborative reproductive healthcare model**    1  
Sharon N. Covington and G. David Adamson  
2 **Reproductive psychology and fertility counseling**    33  
Susan C. Klock

Section 2: Therapeutic approaches

3 **Fertility counseling for individuals**    45  
Linda D. Applegarth  
4 **Fertility counseling for couples**    60  
Brennan D. Peterson  
5 **Spirituality in fertility counseling**    74  
Eileen A. Dombo and Megan Flood  
6 **Reproductive psychiatry and fertility counseling**    85  
Katherine Williams

Section 3: Third party reproduction: assessment and preparation

7 **Counseling recipients of anonymous donor gametes**    97  
Patricia L. Sachs and Carol B. Toll  
8 **Counseling anonymous gamete donors**    109  
Laura Josephs and Uschi Van den Broeck  
9 **Counseling surrogate carrier participants**    122  
Tara H. Simpson and Hilary Hanafin

10 **Counseling known participants in third party reproduction**    136  
Erica J. Mindes and Laura S. Covington

Section 4: The expanding image of families

11 **Last chance or too late? Counseling prospective older parents**    150  
Julianne E. Zweifel  
12 **Counseling single women and single men choosing parenthood**    166  
Lauri A. Pasch and Sarah R. Holley  
13 **Counseling lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients**    180  
Sarah R. Holley and Lauri A. Pasch  
14 **Adoption**    197  
Anne F. Malavé

Section 5: Special topics in fertility counseling

15 **Fertility preservation counseling**    212  
Allison B. Rosen  
16 **Pregnancy and loss counseling**    226  
Irving G. Leon  
17 **The view from the fertility counselor's chair**    239  
Janet Jaffe  
18 **Disclosure: helping families talk about assisted reproduction**    252  
Jean M. Benward

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Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

Contents

Section 6: Practice issues

- 19 **An evidence-based approach to counseling for fertility treatment compliance** 265  
Sofia Gameiro and Jacky Boivin
- 20 **Ethical aspects of fertility counseling** 281  
Joann Paley Galst and Judith E. Horowitz
- 21 **Legal issues for fertility counselors** 296  
Margaret Swain and William Petok

- 22 **Cross-border reproductive services and fertility counseling** 308  
Petra Thorn and Eric Blyth

*Glossary* 321  
*Index* 324

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## Foreword

The ever-changing world of reproductive medicine has introduced a new cohort of individuals and couples to the possibility of parenthood. A burgeoning of innovative technologies and the introduction of third party reproduction have given hope to a diverse group of would-be parents including patients beyond reproductive age, cancer patients seeking fertility preservation, same-sex couples and a growing number of other family configurations wanting children. The spectacular growth of this discipline has ushered in a host of social, psychological and ethical complexities that has increased the need for fertility counseling and collaboration between clinicians working in this field.

This book is a boon to mental health professionals and other practitioners struggling to keep pace with this rapidly evolving field. Sharon Covington and her contributors have provided an excellent reference source for the management of patients entering this new world. Each chapter, written by a distinguished international scholar or clinician, begins with a case study – a uniquely effective model. Medical schools, law schools and business schools have recognized that case studies are the best way to learn because they offer the complexity and feel of an authentic clinical encounter. Each case addresses an issue particularly salient today to patients, fertility counselors and the medical treatment team and underscores the psychological, ethical and medical aspects of assisted reproduction. The cases vary widely, exploring issues and problems once considered rare and unusual but now rapidly becoming mainstream. By focusing on actual cases (altered only to protect privacy) the challenges and nuances of these issues can be explored in detail.

The foundation of the book is based on the concept of collaborative reproductive healthcare, so superbly introduced by Sharon Covington and David Adamson in the opening chapter. This is the model that we followed when we started our work together in 1982 in the Yale fertility program, shortly after the first IVF baby in our program was born. DeCherney, already

a well-established reproductive endocrinologist with years of treating the infertile, upon hearing the hue and cry from a public trumpeting ethical concerns about “test tube babies” and recognizing the impact of emotional uncertainty and anguish that accompanies infertility, decided that it made sense to have a mental health professional on the team to provide counsel and support. Greenfeld, a newly graduated social worker who knew nothing about infertility and its treatment and certainly nothing about infertility counseling (a term that had not yet been coined), readily joined the team and learned, as most novice clinicians do, from colleagues and from the patients themselves.

As we reflect back on those early days of IVF, we consider the factors common to the cases we shared at that time. Typically, patients with a long history of infertility often traveled great distances at considerable expense for that one last chance at pregnancy at a time when success rates were low. We were providing new medical technology and grappling with the short-term stresses of the treatment as well as its longer-term psychological and social implications among this hopeful, yet vulnerable, early group of patients. As major advances have transformed the field since those early days, the psychological, ethical and legal challenges faced by our patients have steadily increased, requiring ever more knowledge and clinical skill. This text provides an accessible review of these changes and the clinical techniques for addressing them.

As editor, Sharon Covington draws on her years of clinical experience and astute observation, broad theoretical background and precise communication skills to bring together a pivotal volume capturing the state of the field today. Her expertise is evidenced by her selection of topics and formatting of the chapters, which provide the experienced clinician or the novice trainee new insights into this exciting field. She has created a volume that will continue to be a training and reference tool for years to come.

*Alan DeCherney and Dorothy Greenfeld*

## Acknowledgments

Writing, for me, has always been like giving birth. I contemplate endlessly, experience great anxiety and anguish as I start; slowly and painfully labor away until I finally can push the finished work out – and then wait, wonder and hope others will love what I have produced. Creating this book has been more like assisted reproduction. The process began with hopes and dreams that couldn't be completed, which led to a treatment decision and new approach. With the help, support and advice of many I was able to formulate a plan for a text that would be strong clinically and yet personal and relevant. I had been hearing in the fertility counseling classes I teach to mental health professionals that they wanted tools to help them in their practice (so they would not have to “reinvent” the wheel) as well as learn how clinicians do their work through illustrative case material. *Fertility Counseling* is the culmination of this vision, conceived and gestated with the assistance of many helping hands.

The process would not have begun without the steadfast support, assistance, patience and good nature of my editor, Nick Dunton, and Cambridge University Press. In addition, each of my esteemed contributors was enthusiastic and committed to tackling this new project, which made moving forward possible with renewed energy. Reading their chapters, I was not only enlightened but challenged to think more critically about my own clinical work with infertility patients. I also realized just how far this field has come since I began working in reproductive medicine over 30 years ago. Wanting to use the collaborative reproductive healthcare model as a foundation of the book, I am greatly appreciative of my friend Dr. David Adamson agreeing to write it with me. David is one of the most highly regarded (and busiest) reproductive endocrinologists in the world and has long been a proponent of the integration and coordination of psychosocial care within the American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE).

I also was honored that Dr. Alan DeCherney and Dorothy Greenfeld MSW agreed to write the Foreword, as I believe they established one of the very first practices of this model at Yale Fertility Center many years ago. Alan had a vision early on that his patients needed specialized assistance with the psychological demands of infertility and treatment, and therefore sought Dorothy out as a social worker in one of the hospital's clinics. Alan, who is the head of my department at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and former Editor in Chief of *Fertility and Sterility*, was an early supporter of “The Mentals,” a term I recall he good-naturedly used for fertility counselors. Dorothy has been my good friend since we met at my first ASRM meeting in 1986. She has been a pioneer and leader in infertility counseling as a clinician, researcher, writer, educator and social networker as she is always so welcoming to new clinicians to the field. To each and every colleague who contributed to this text, I am deeply grateful and appreciative.

Many other hands helped to make it possible for me to do this project. My practice with Shady Grove Fertility Reproductive Science Center has formulated my work and has expanded beyond my wildest imagination since we began almost 25 years ago. With an outstanding staff of 33 doctors, nurses and administrative assistants (now totaling over 550 staff, in 18 offices extending to 4 states), there is not space to acknowledge all who hold my gratitude, yet a special thanks to: Drs. Robert Stillman, Michael Levy and Eric Widra; and nurses Michele Purcell, Margaret Ann Connors and Marsha Deweese. I am blessed to have an amazing staff of social workers and psychologists, several of whom have shared their wisdom and extensive experience in chapters here on third party reproduction: Patricia Sachs, Carol Toll, Ellen Eule, Erica Hanson, Michelle Hester, Erica Mindes, Tara Simpson, Mia Joelsson and my daughter, Laura Covington. These extraordinary women have sustained and bolstered me throughout the years, and I am eternally

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Finally, and foremost, is my love and gratitude to the hands that help and hold me at home. My family has been by my side throughout my career and with every book I have done, assisting in so many ways. There has never been a greater supporter in my life and in my work than my husband, Barry. He is a man of kindness, courage and intellect, who loves with his whole heart and gives selflessly to others,

setting an example for our children. All my children have jumped in whenever I needed it: my oldest daughter, Michelle, with technology challenges, editing advice, design decisions and always a good ear; my son, Brendan, with all my computer struggles, graphic designs and internet problems and my daughter-in-law, Darlene, who willingly shared her expertise in writing and marketing; and my youngest daughter, Laura, who has developed the same passion for this profession and has brought me great joy to share it with her – I appreciate her team spirit at work, while being knee-deep in her doctoral program. My son-in-law, Scott, and our four beautiful grandchildren, Sean, Michaela, Liam and Luke were there to offer a welcome distraction and a perspective on what is important in life. It has also brought me happiness and pleasure to share my profession, and now this field, with my sister-in-law, Bonnie Cochran LCSW. Bonnie is a cheerleader in life, encouraging, caring and taking the initiative to do what needs to be done. And to my “chosen” sisters, Virginia Frederick LCSW, Sandra Takai MD and Sheila Cave, who listened to my struggles, understood my needs and always encouraged me to bring out my best throughout this process, a special thank you!

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*Sharon Covington*