

Spring 2024

Forming Families

*Dr. Samuel Brown:
Mental Wellness and
Fertility Care*

*5 Ways to
Care for Your
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*ARC Partner Practice
Spotlight: Balancing
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Wellness and Fertility
Treatment*



Samuel Brown, M.D.

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Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of Forming Families, our quarterly exploration of critical issues in fertility medicine and family-forming practice. ARC Fertility proudly presents this resource for patients, practitioners, employers and benefits decision-makers seeking insights into the latest in fertility medicine.

There is growing recognition among employers that providing fertility benefits not only supports their current workforce and boosts employee retention but also gives them a competitive edge in attracting top talent. Studies reveal that employees feel more appreciated and valued when fertility benefits are included in the benefits package. This is key to enhancing workplace productivity and addressing emotional well-being during fertility treatments.

This edition of Forming Families sheds light on the importance of being a “phone call away” from concierge services that coordinate access to comprehensive mental health – often referred to as behavioral health -- services and emotional health support by fertility specialists. These resources not only enhance psychological well-being and quality of life but also increase cumulative live birth rates: our experience documents that patients remain in treatment for longer durations when they have this level of positive support.

Employers play a crucial role in achieving these optimal outcomes and enabling employees to thrive and remain productive. Read on to discover how combining evidence-based fertility care with behavioral health services enhances the journey to parenthood.

Sincerely,



David Adamson, MD

Founder and CEO
ARC Fertility

Dr. Samuel Brown on the Intersection of Mental Health and Fertility Care

In this interview, Dr. Samuel Brown, who oversees more than 30,000 in-vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles as medical director of Brown Fertility, discusses the positive impact of mental healthcare on fertility patients' results and quality of life.

When did you first become aware of the intersection of fertility and mental health?

Doctors in my field become aware that mental health is a big issue during our OB/GYN residencies. Emotional stakes go up a few notches when it comes to fertility patient care. A lot of OB/GYN doctors don't go into infertility because it's so emotional.

Does mental wellness impact fertility outcomes? Have you experienced a difference or looked into research?

Studies show that stress has nothing to do with implantation. Biologically, that's my number one myth. What do patients hear from the uneducated audience, from their neighbors and from their friends? "It's just stress. Just quit your job and you'll get pregnant." Good science shows stress does not cause infertility. I'm not going to be so arrogant to say stress has nothing to do with it because studies also show stress keeps patients from seeing doctors. But it's hard to measure that. We know financial stress is also a big one. Once they come in and have their new patient appointment, 50% of new patients don't return.

How do you counsel your patients to care for their mental health?

One of the first questions we ask as fertility specialists is, "How are you doing?" We want to know, "Is this killing you? Are you crying every night?" We assess psychological state during interviews with patients and they'll say that we're having trouble but doing okay with it. And we always advocate for psychological care. Almost every fertility center, including our clinic, has a psychologist available.

We see couples divorcing over this or talking about suicide. It's real. Many of our patients have serious psychological issues with treatment.

Some use that energy to be productive, but others can be destructive with that energy. Anybody that's seen fertility patients knows the gravity of the psychological issues associated with what we do.



What mental wellness steps would you recommend for the partners of fertility patients?

If you're in distress, get to a counselor or a psychologist who may send you to a psychiatrist.

We try to help families acknowledge that this is a very difficult time for all partners involved. But we also give them hope. As fertility providers, we make it clear that all of our patients can have children. They may have to use a donor or a gestational carrier, but literally 100% of our patients will have success if they can psychologically persevere. It's our job as providers to offer this message of hope to give patients the energy to move forward.

Discuss the ways you've integrated mental health into your fertility practice.

Our fertility center has delved deeper into addressing the emotional aspects of fertility treatment over time. Recognizing the significant emotional challenges our patients face, we have prioritized incorporating psychological support into our practice. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has played a crucial role in ensuring patients have access to this vital component of care.

For the past three decades, providing psychological counseling has become a cornerstone of our approach. The vast majority of fertility centers either employ a psychologist or counselor directly or maintain a close association with mental wellness professionals. This partnership is essential in helping our patients navigate the complex emotional terrain that accompanies fertility treatment.

5 Ways an Infertility Patient Can Take Care of Their Mental Health



Give yourself the space to feel your emotions. It's okay to feel sad, angry, frustrated, and more.



Celebrate all the positives of your fertility journey, no matter how small.



Identify the people in your life you want to share your journey with. Feel confident and comfortable confiding in the ones you've chosen.



Prioritize self-care. Whether you want to take 20 minutes alone to read a book or spend an afternoon at the spa, treat yourself to time away from thinking about infertility.



Get help if you need it. There is no shame in needing to speak to someone outside of your circle about mental health. Feel proud of yourself for reaching out to a professional.



Show Employees You Care with Mental
Wellness and Fertility Treatment

Employers Make a Big Difference for Mental Wellness, Family-Forming, and Team-Building

There is growing recognition that infertility is more than just a medical problem – it impacts all aspects of life, including mental health. Understanding this profound link is an important issue for employers looking to provide comprehensive benefits that meet employee expectations for holistic care that encompasses physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Fertility treatment can be highly stressful and may interfere with many aspects of a patient's life and work. According to Dr. Thais Varzoni of Mind360, who has been working with infertility mental health for over 7 years, "40% of all women experiencing fertility will have a psychiatric diagnosis. People experience anxiety, depression, grief, and loss."

As benefits decision-makers learn these statistics specific to infertility, they are even more confident about expanding mental health coverage. Dr. Varzoni emphasizes that patients often have trouble finding care in their social circle. Their family, friends, or faith community may not be equipped to manage the needs of a person undergoing family-forming care. For these patients especially, mental health coverage is just as important as treatments like IVF. "Whether finding a therapist in person or online, nobody should have to go through treatment alone," says Dr. Varzoni.

Fertility treatments often involve medications that can alter a patient's mood. "Patients will admit they become irritable or snappy. Treatment will change their mood and how they feel on a biochemical level," says Dr. Varzoni. Relationships can also suffer as sex becomes a chore and all partners bear the expectation and potential grief of long-term effort.

Dr. Varzoni stresses the importance of self-care when undergoing family-forming treatment: "Give yourself permission to cry, to be angry. Feelings are meant to be felt." When seeing family or friends who have children causes anxiety, it may be better to stay home. "If you don't want to go to that baby shower, don't go. That's a great time to send a gift online."

Self-care on its own simply isn't enough, especially as one of the main stressors of fertility care is cost – which is also a common barrier for mental healthcare. "Care is extremely expensive, and those costs can impact patients' work as they pick and choose between the treatment that might give them a baby, and the emotional support that will help them carry to term and be healthy parents," Dr. Varzoni says.

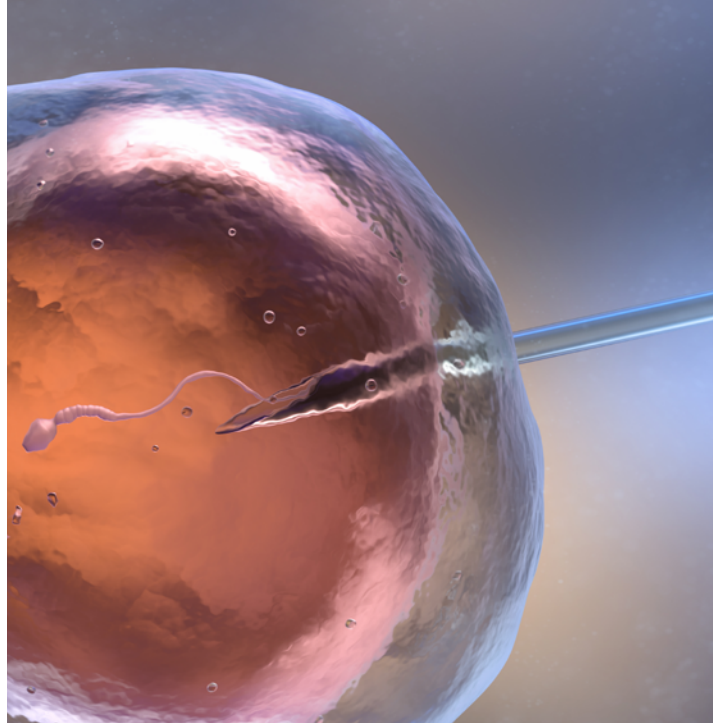
Employers are uniquely positioned to solve these problems and support their team members. By providing both comprehensive fertility care and state-of-the-art mental healthcare benefits, businesses can ensure their employees do not lose productivity or suffer undue mental stress. Helping with the cost of care and removing emotional and financial burdens sends a message to current and prospective employees that they prioritize their well-being.

"We need to normalize the fact that this is hard. Anyone can benefit from going to a professional for help, and employers should ensure that mental well-being and fertility care go hand-in-hand," says Dr. Varzoni

Balancing Mental Wellness with Fertility Treatment is Hard

ARC Partner Brown Fertility Makes It Happen

ARC has teamed up with fertility practices across the country. These three elite professionals understand that psychological health is necessary to help get patients into treatment and keep them in treatment so they can achieve the best fertility outcomes.



Christine Garcia

Registered Nurse

Christine, a dedicated Jacksonville native with honors in nursing, brings her expertise in Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility to Brown Fertility, playing a pivotal role on the IVF nursing team, offering emotional support and clinical guidance to patients, and finding great joy in helping them achieve their dreams. Christine loves working with ARC Fertility because this company helps to lessen the stress of an already overwhelming process for patients.



Denisse Chihuan

Jacksonville Operations Manager

Denisse, originally from Lima, Peru, graduated as a Medical Assistant from Sanford-Brown College before dedicating over a decade to Brown Fertility, where she serves as Clinical Operations Manager. She plays a crucial role in daily operations and finds fulfillment in assisting patients. Denisse appreciates working with ARC Fertility for their swift assistance in covering treatment costs for patients.



Edwin Salinas

Billing Manager

Edwin, with 17 years of experience in medical billing and a passion for easing patients' journeys, is a vital asset to Brown Fertility. He manages claims and billing, ensuring patients receive proper insurance coverage, drawing from his extensive background including roles at Shady Grove Fertility and Embryo Options. Edwin enjoys working with ARC Fertility due to their prompt support in covering treatment costs, which alleviates financial burdens for patients, as well as their supportive approach and streamlined processes.