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FAST CHAT

In wilds of infertility, an advocate for parents

By Heidi Stevens,
Tribune reporter

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Mindy Berkson spent 3 1/2 years undergoing in vitro fertilization treatments before conceiving twin boys, now 11—so she gets infertility. She also has a 16-year-old daughter who was conceived naturally—so she gets secondary infertility.

What she doesn't get is why infertility is so stigmatized. "So what if you delayed child-bearing?" Berkson says. "At 40, you're the best mother you could possibly be."

Inspired by her own struggles, and drawing on her background in the financial and medical fields, Berkson, 45, founded Lotus Blossom Consulting, a Chicago company that helps infertile couples, same-sex couples and singles navigate the wilds of assisted reproduction—IVF, egg donors, sperm donors, surrogates. Berkson charges clients \$3,000 to \$12,000 depending what services they need, plus the cost of the services themselves.

Q: What does an infertility consultant do?

A: I consider myself the quarterback of the team. Reproductive endocrinologists, attorneys, mental health professionals, alternative medicine professionals, fitness professionals, financial and estate planners are all part of the core team. So it's really important that the intended parent has an advocate—to understand what they're signing, what happens if a surrogacy candidate drops out of the programs, how to find a new match.

Q: Walk me through a typical consultation.

A: There's no cookie-cutter consultation, but, for example, if you came to me looking for an egg donor, I would ask: What is the end family-building goal? How many kids are you and your

partner looking for to complete your family? How do we maximize your pool of financial resources? Because egg donors can create frozen embryos for future genetic siblings and we want to maximize that opportunity.

Q: And for surrogates?

A: We find like-minded candidates, someone who would do with a pregnancy what you would do with a pregnancy. If there's a chromosomal abnormality, is the surrogate willing to do what you would?

Q: And you're there throughout the process?

A: I am with them for the whole term. The majority of my work is accomplished up front—banking the umbilical cord blood is really important with assisted reproduction. I'm there to find resources, like doulas, specific to their needs, and I have all of those relationships nationwide—many of whom offer discounts to my clients.

Q: Do clients ever say, "I had no idea what was involved in this process"?

A: Ninety-eight percent of the time that's the reaction. If you don't have all of these thought processes in place, you may end up spending money needlessly or making split-second decisions.

hstevens@tribune.com

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