Urgent need to remove social stigma associated with Assisted Reproductive Techniques

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While it is not uncommon for women to now have their first baby at 35, a percentage of them have problems conceiving. In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is considered to be a blessing for all such couples who face reproductive challenges.

However, in our country, there is a huge stigma associated with assisted reproductive techniques. On the occasion of World Embryologists Day 2017, it is imperative to raise awareness about the myths and facts surrounding IVF and other surrounding IVF and other such path breaking methods.

Along with IVF, there are many technological advancements under the domain of reproductive medicine like ICSI (Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection), IUI (Intra uterine insemination), Assisted Laser Hatching etc. which can help couples bear children. The stigma is largely because infertility is still looked upon as a personal shortcoming rather than a medical problem.

Dr **Hrishikesh D Pai**, Medical Director, **Bloom IVF Group** & Secretary General of the **Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Societies of India** said, "Advances in science and technology in the form of assisted reproductive techniques like IVF have proven to be a boon for couples who cannot conceive naturally or conceive naturally or choose to delay by few years. Our Indian society still views this process with a narrow mind and is not very forthcoming towards those who choose to go for assisted conception."

Adding, "Thus, for many couples, getting treated for infertility becomes a personal failure and for others, it is about retaining their dignity in the society. Couples should be encouraged to discuss the emotional and psychological aspects of their journey to get pregnant so that they do not feel out of the place and accept their decision with open arms."

Adding to this, Dr **Nandita Palshetkar**, Medical Director, Bloom IVF Group said, "Assisted reproductive techniques have been a subject of much discussion and debate, albeit not by those who have chosen to take this route for a baby but by others. Consequently, there is an apprehension surrounding them which makes countless couples deny or hide the fact that they have conceived through one of these techniques."

Adding, "Indians do not have a very positive approach towards someone who faces infertility issues to the extent that such couples are also considered incapable and a failure. Although this is changing with more and more couples opting to have babies through IVF and other methods, there is still a long way to go in terms of removing the social stigma associated with them. Men feel incomplete if they are unable to father a baby and women are ostracized by the society at large. There is a need to create more awareness about the fact that babies born through these techniques are as normal and healthy as those born without them."

It is important to encourage couples to come out and talk about their fears and apprehensions, which will help them overcome this mental block. This can be done by introducing the concept of support groups and peer groups as in the West where people who have already had children through these techniques discuss and talk to would-be parents about their doubts and anxieties.

Bloom IVF will be working with partners to build such networks/groups where couples can access such information and peer opinions. These can help them make empowered choices about safe, effective avenues to explore vis-a-vis the critical decision of expanding their families.