

Infertility Support Online

Let's face it, infertility is tough! It affects 1 in 6 Canadians and often results in psychological distress. It can be difficult to get enough emotional and psychological support from those around us and what is provided by healthcare workers, namely fertility doctors, nurses, ultrasound technologists, embryologists, and counsellors can be limited. Therefore, it's no wonder patients seek alternative support on the World Wide Web. The increased access to the internet over recent years has hugely impacted the way in which people communicate and exchange knowledge.

It has been shown that people undergoing fertility treatment refer to the internet for:

- ❖ Diagnosis and therapy (84%)
- ❖ Evaluation of fertility clinics (51%)
- ❖ Searching for self-help groups (25%)
- ❖ Purchasing fertility drugs (19%) (*Huang et al, 2003*)

It is estimated that 1 in 4 health-information seekers join a support group. Online support groups offer an alternative to professional care by delivering social support, information, and shared experiences.

The benefits of peer-support and self-help groups include:

- ❖ Mutual support
- ❖ Problem solving
- ❖ Friendship
- ❖ Hope and encouragement
- ❖ Sense of universality (*Malik and Coulson, 2008*)

One participant commented about the accessibility of the online community: *"it is convenient and I know where to easily find a group of people who know what I'm going through"*.

After accessing online support, some individuals report the following experiences:

- ❖ Improved relationship with partner
- ❖ Reduced sense of isolation
- ❖ Increased information and empowerment (*Malik and Coulson, 2008*)

But buyer beware! The internet can be a breeding ground for misguided and false information. No one knows your health history better than your healthcare provider. Your doctor, nurses and laboratory staff have gone through extensive training to provide you with the most up-to-date knowledge as it pertains to you.

Unsure of what you read online? Reach out to us! Here at KARMA, we provide a secure e-messaging system which permits patients to send questions and concerns to the fertility team. Not only this, a discussion forum allows for exchanges to be made between patients. This clinic-specific online fertility community may help anyone feeling isolated from the 'fertile world' since it holds geographical or temporal constraints and has a degree of anonymity. It is highly advised for patients to take advantage of the KARMA Network to help prevent feelings of uncertainty before, during and after fertility treatments.

A useful resource for general fertility facts and figures can be found at: <http://fertilitymatters.ca/>. Be sure to follow us on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KARMA-193494947464428/> for news and updates.