



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Helping Patients Through Pregnancy Loss

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There is a lot of focus in the acupuncture world on fertility and helping women get pregnant. It's exhilarating to hear the news that a patient is expecting a baby. The other side of that is pregnancy loss. That includes abortion, miscarriage or stillbirth. I invite you to consider that, as practitioners, we can draw on our acupuncture skills and our compassion to help women get through this very difficult time.

Acknowledgment: I'm sorry for your loss

The simple act of acknowledging their loss can go a long way. Pregnancy loss is not acknowledged very much in our society.

Sometimes people just don't know what to say or do. It is something that often leaves women and their partners isolated. If it resonates with you, consider offering a greeting card to your patient. You may also suggest that they seek out books, support groups or ceremonies in their community to help them and their partners grieve and heal.

Encourage your patient and their partners to ask for support from friends and family. Often after a woman gives birth, friends and family come over to help out with chores, bring food, gifts and offer company. Women experiencing pregnancy loss need this too but they may shy away from asking.

How Chinese Medicine can help

Consider that, as in childbirth, women going through pregnancy loss will lose a lot of *qi* and Blood. As such, you might nourish *qi* and Blood in your treatments. Unlike childbirth however, there is no joy associated with pregnancy loss. There may be other emotions such as sadness, grief, or fear, so remember to treat their *Shen* as well. If your patient has a D&C, there may also be *qi* and Blood stagnation from the surgery. Be sure to use a differential diagnosis to come up with a treatment plan for each patient.



If you are treating someone who decides to terminate a pregnancy, whether it is a choice not to be pregnant, if they are carrying a fetus with genetic abnormalities, or for any other reason, please remember that this is their decision to make. It is our job to support our patients with acupuncture, moxibustion and Chinese herbs. We can offer them compassion as they make this difficult decision. If you feel that you cannot support them due to your personal beliefs, please refer them to another acupuncturist.

Some acupuncturists offer house calls to new moms because it is important for them to receive care for all the reasons mentioned above. If you have the time and resources, why not also offer these to women who have had a miscarriage, abortion or stillbirth?

Remember to take time out for yourself

As practitioners, hearing about pregnancy loss can be hard for us too. You may be having feelings of grief, sadness, or guilt, among others. Please remember to do some self-care after difficult appointments like this. It's not your fault. You did your very best to help your patient. You do not have a crystal ball to see how every pregnancy will turn out. You're not a god and you don't have to be. You just need to be who you are - a compassionate human and acupuncturist.

The acupuncture community has an opportunity to help women and their partners through pregnancy loss. The way we can help involves both our skills as acupuncturists and our compassion as human beings. By doing so, we can make a difference in their lives by showing them that they are not alone, to help them find closure, and offer them hope.

References

1. E-cards and Grief resources:
www.babylosscomfort.com/grief-resources/e-cards/
www.babylosscomfort.com/grief-resources/

2. Mizuko Kuyo ceremony in the Japanese tradition for honoring the spirits of babies lost through miscarriage, abortion or stillbirth:
<http://mizuko.com.au/translations.html>
3. Other ceremonies in the United States:
<http://spiritbabies.org>
www.sfzc.org/ggf/display.asp?catid=&pageid=1460
4. Self Care for acupuncturists:
www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=32222
5. Books about Pregnancy Loss:
Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin
Spirit Babies: How to Communicate with the Child You're Meant to Have by Walter Makichen
A Cry from the Womb: Healing the Heart of the World: A Guide to Healing and Helping Souls Return to the Light After Sudden Death, Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Abortion by Gwendolyn Awen Jones

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