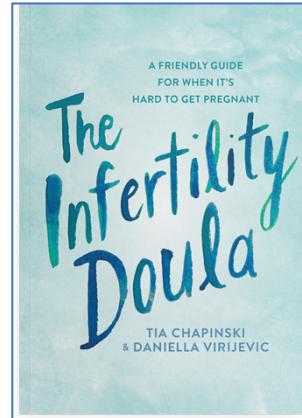


Clinic Sofia's Dr. David Clay had the opportunity to share the following foreword in "The Infertility Doula," a book that was co-authored by one of his patients.



"Infertility is something that most people never expect to have to struggle with and is a painful surprise when it occurs. Many often spend their younger years worrying about accidentally getting pregnant. The idea that it may be difficult to conceive isn't even a consideration. Once you are in the process of trying and it isn't working out, it can suddenly feel like everyone you know is "not even trying but # blessed" on social media, and no one else is struggling like you. Although as many as 1 in 8 couples struggle with infertility, it is something which is unbelievably sad and most do not want to talk about it. This leads most couples to feel like it is uncommon and that they don't know others who have struggled, even though they almost-assuredly do."

Infertility is awful. It is hard emotionally, physically, and financially. Having personally struggled through fertility and pregnancy loss journeys hand-in-hand with my wife, Nicole, and also having professionally been a part of so many other couples' journeys, I understand the heartache and how isolating the journey can feel. Nicole and I both chose careers in healthcare, so we had delayed having kids a bit, but so had most of our friends. Once we were ready to start trying, our social media feeds were seemingly constantly filled with pregnancy announcements and adorable baby pictures. While I was happy for them, it was still a little too much for me to stomach in the moment, so I un-followed a lot of people for my own mental health. Being an ob/gyn myself, I had always had an interest in infertility but now it really hit home. I tried to wear both hats of husband and physician with Nicole to discuss medications and, more broadly, the diagnosis of PCOS. Although it was helpful at times, other times having me be in both roles was not what either of us needed, so we started to formally seek out care.

Due to our training and work schedules, we were not able to utilize every cycle, but after four years of intermittently trying to conceive, we were fortunate enough to have our son. Once we decided that we were ready to start trying again for a second child, we mentally prepared for another long course of trying, but were pleasantly surprised to conceive rather quickly. This changed to devastation when we miscarried and what was worse was that it happened while I was out of town for a work conference. Though Nicole declined having me come home for support, in retrospect, we both wish I had. I still recall once again trying to wear both hats as I offered support while also explaining my normal medical responses I give to all of my patients: this is actually very common, it isn't at all our fault, it couldn't have been prevented, etc. I then spent the rest of the night crying while having that "irrational" half of my brain fight the "logical" half on wondering what it was we did wrong, even though I knew the medical answers. Our next pregnancy was sadly another miscarriage and while this one was emotionally a little easier than the first, when we finally did conceive again, the back-to-back losses really took the joy out of first trimester as I spent the whole time holding my breath that we wouldn't lose another one. Ultimately, everything went well this time and though she decided to arrive a little prematurely, we now have a daughter as well.

Throughout this process, I know Nicole has appreciated having the ability to turn to me with medical questions. However, when she wanted to see what other information was out there and find other women who were struggling, it was actually somewhat difficult to do so. I have had the pleasure of speaking at the RESOLVE Midwest Family Building Summit on the Infertility 101 panel about things from a general ob/gyn perspective the last few years. I still recall in 2017, after giving my own presentation in the morning, Nicole and I then stayed the

rest of the day and attended numerous insightful sessions ranging from what teas to drink to advances in IVF. During our initial infertility journey and then our subsequent miscarriage journey, Nicole turned to support groups on Reddit and found those helpful for not feeling so alone and also getting more information, but also found occasionally the advice wasn't actually medically sound, which made her often feel skeptical about anything she read.

Unfortunately, reliable information about infertility - evaluation, diagnoses, management options, general expectations along the way, etc. - can be hard to come by. "The Infertility Doula" is a fantastic resource for those who are starting the journey, looking for redirection, or have been on the path for a long time. The mix of direct information and anecdotal support offers the reader both the facts that they may be seeking while also offering a real voice throughout the book to help you feel you're not alone as you go. It will definitely be an asset to anyone who finds themselves struggling with infertility and I would highly recommend it.

The journey down the path of infertility is difficult and I sincerely hope for anyone who is on it that they can find joy at the end – whether it is a biological child, a non-biological child (whether via donor, surrogacy, or adoption), or being at peace with choosing to remain childless – but no matter what the outcome, the journey will change you and you will grow from it. It's okay to not always feel okay during this process, but remember, you're not alone. Countless others still are or have been here, too. We know your pain, and we can't wait to celebrate your triumphs. All the best to anyone and everyone throughout."

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