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BREAK THROUGH: NEW TEST SCREENS FOR SPERM DNA DAMAGE

New York, NY December 4, 2002 - About 30 to 40% of all infertility cases have a male factor as the main cause and 40-50% as a contributing cause. Bearing these statistics in mind, it is somewhat puzzling that women seem to be the cause of “blame” when infertility becomes an issue. The bottom line is that just because sperm moves does not mean it is capable of initiating a live birth. Thousands of would be parents can now be saved from costly infertility treatments through a revolutionary Sperm Test called SCSA which stands for Sperm Chromatin Structure Assay. Reproductive experts use to think that all that was needed in this era of IVF were several live sperm to make a baby. Experts now know that this is not entirely the case.

Dr. Philip Werthman is a Los Angeles urologist and male fertility expert. He has become frustrated at the medical community at large who seem to negate the male role in the fertility equation. As Dr. Werthman explains, what matters is not only the sperm count, percentage of sperm that swim, how they appear and whether the sperm can penetrate and fertilize an egg, but also the health of the sperm, and the amount of DNA damage inside. This is really a biochemical issue at the molecular level. Looking at sperm underneath a microscope is very important, but not a perfect way of assessing the ability of sperm to fertilize a woman’s eggs or contribute to a birth.”

Dr. Werthman is at the forefront of a small group of physicians who offer male patients this new test, which is actually able to screen a man for sperm DNA damage, and possible infertility. The test is painless, non-invasive, and cost efficient in the sense that it can screen men who might have very unhealthy or damaged sperm before their spouses go through infertility treatments that may have low chances of succeeding. It entails the man producing a semen sample just like for a semen analysis. A standard semen analysis is done on one part of the sample and the other portion is frozen and sent to the specialized lab in South Dakota that performs the assay. The percentage of damaged sperm is calculated and the sperm is determined to be good, fair or poor fertility potential.

The test determines three key factors:

- What is the likelihood of the sperm contributing to the birth of a healthy baby?
- What percentage of sperm has damage?
- Can the sperm sample be used for In-Vitro procedures or should the male partner be treated to improve the quality of the sperm?

Dr. Werthman says that this test is for men who have had an abnormal semen analysis or have unexplained infertility. Dr. Werthman emphatically states that, “this should be performed before money is invested in IVF treatment because DNA damage can be repaired. All of the same factors that have been known to cause male infertility may cause DNA sperm damage such as infections, varicocele, smoking, and exposure to

chemical toxins to name a few. The damage is potentially reversible when the stress triggers are removed.”

Many couples today are unfortunately going the route of IVF because the SCSA test is not widely known and mysteriously has not received much attention in the media to date. Its roots are in animal husbandry and traditionally used by those who purchased animals and wanted to assure sperm quality for reproduction. The test has been used for years as a research tool, but it is only in the last six months to a year that doctors are realizing the important information the test can yield in a clinical setting. If more potential patients can become aware of this medical breakthrough, countless numbers will be spared the heartache and cost of going through IVF treatment where damaged sperm is really the culprit.

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