

Are Mistakes Common?

Rabbi Gideon Weitzman

Last time we discussed the need for halachic supervision of fertility treatments and how PUAH developed such supervision. Recently an article claimed that this supervision is unnecessary as mistakes rarely occur. This claim is problematic on two accounts; first it is simply not true. PUAH has discovered and prevented mistakes worldwide, the most recent being in the past year.

In a disturbing report from Britain the Human Fertilization and Embryo Authority (HFEA) reported in 2014 that in the previous three years there had been 1679 reported mistakes in fertility clinics. That amounts to more than 500 annually, or almost one and a half every single day. The HFEA only discussed reported mistakes and we must add an unknown number of unreported and undiscovered mistakes. While it is true that only a handle of these were serious mistakes involving the mix up of genetic material it is clear that mistakes are not a rare occurrence and cannot be ignored.

In addition, the frequency of an event must be taken into account together with the severity of the event. Even if we can claim that disastrous mistakes occur rarely, when they do happen they have particularly tragic results. The

couple who discover that their unborn child is in fact not theirs are thrown into a whirlwind of emotions and face impossible decisions as to whether to terminate the pregnancy. There was a couple in the past who discovered during the pregnancy that they were carrying another couple's child. The woman carried the pregnancy to full term, delivered the baby and gave it over to the genetic parents.

It is impossible to fathom how catastrophic this would be for the couple. Even considering the possibility is enough to deter some couples from undergoing treatment at all. The fear that they will be that one couple who will experience the tragic mistake will determine that they will either not undergo treatment or will be frantic throughout the treatment. We have seen many couples having such fears before they learn that supervision exists.

And so to claim that supervision is unnecessary is not halachically sound and is also detached from the reality of countless couples. Every time there is a report of a mistake occurring we at PUAH are inundated with conversations from extremely concerned couples. The only way to alleviate their fear is a close and professional system of halachic supervision.

More on this next week.

The Puah Institute is based in Jerusalem and helps couples from all over the world who are experiencing fertility problems. Puah offers free counseling in five languages, halachic supervision, and educational programs. Offices in Jerusalem, New York, Los Angeles, Paris. Contact: (02) 651-5050 (Isr) • 718-336-0603 (US) • www.puahonline.org