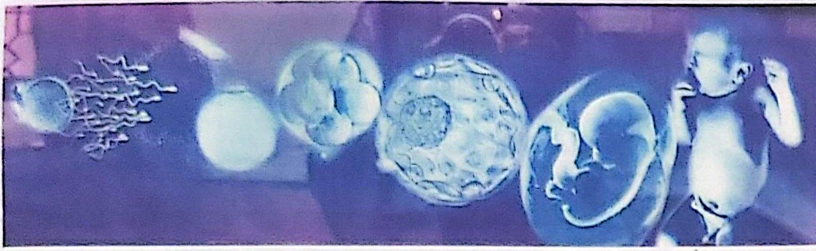


Business of Babies

SET-UP

Shs15m

Cost. The average amount in Uganda shillings one requires for IVF treatment.



'I was told not to wear underwear to bear children'

Traumatic. Couple narrates to Henry Lubega the trauma they underwent because of failing to bear children, including drinking several litres of herbal concoctions, only to be rescued by services of a fertility hospital.

Hamza Kafeero and Sharifah Nampijja (not real names) endured a difficult three years of ridicule simply because they had not had children three years into their marriage.

Thirty two-year-old Kafeero and his wife sought help from a number of hospitals and clinics, and Nampijja even resorted to herbalists. They were eager to have children and ready to do anything possible to make it happen.

"We saw different gynaecologists, with each giving us a different prognosis and medication," says Kafeero. Despite the many trips to different hospitals, their problem was never solved. Kafeero's wife interjects, saying as time went by, stress and tension set in.

"Some doctors were telling me it was stress stopping me from conceiving, but how was I to avoid stress with people talking behind my back. It was unavoidable," Nampijja says.

She adds that she did everything that doctors advised to do, though

some were bizarre. "Among the things, I was told to stop putting on knickers, leggings, and high heels," she says.

With the hospital not offering any solution that seemed to be working, Nampijja opted to go to herbalists. "We were prepared to [try all options], but not witchcraft. We visited almost every stall selling herbal medicine in Kampala. At one point, I was given 20 litres by a herbalist with instructions to take it in three days," says Nampijja.

The husband adds: "We had become medical nomads moving from one hospital to another with no success." After sharing their challenge with friends, the couple was directed to the women's hospital to try their luck.

"It was through friends that we learnt of the Women's Hospital International and Fertility Centre. We first went for consultation, but we didn't have the money and we told the doctor so," says Nampijja.

"During the consultation, Dr

Tamale Sali told us one of the tubes was blocked, something that we had not been told in the different places we had gone to," she adds.

Breakthrough

A year after consultations with the women's hospital, Kafeero checked out and found a call for childless couples to send in a video clip of their baby search experience.

"It was not easy to convince my wife to take part in the video clip; she was pessimistic about it. Fortunately, shortly after uploading the video, a one Dr Sam from the hospital called, saying we had been chosen for free IVF treatment."

For Nampijja, the news was too much to take in.

"I couldn't believe the news; out of excitement, I even cried. I could not believe because we had tried to look for money but in vain. The call was made on a Thursday and we were asked to report to the hospital on a Monday." To Kafeero and Nampijja, this was an opportunity they could not take lightly. "We were at the hospital on that morning of the appointed day; tests were done and medication started immediately," says Kafeero. Nampijja underwent

Sophisticated. A laboratory technician carries out an IVF test at a fertility centre in Kampala recently. Inset is the process through which a test tube baby goes. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MASALA

three months of medication, a period which increased the tension on her side. "Three months of medication put me on tension; I was not sure whether this was my chance to become a mother. I was supposed to [go] back for tests 14 days after the implant," she says.

"But within those days, I was always on the Internet checking for signs of positive implant. I went and bought 10 pregnancy tests every day. On the ninth day, I got a faint positive and I was so excited, from then on to the 14th day when I was supposed to return to hospital, I checked to see whether the positive would be clearer than the first one I had seen," she adds.

Process

The hospital confirmed what the couple already knew and was given the list of dos and don'ts. Two weeks later, it was confirmed that Nampijja was carrying twins.

"I was praying for at least one embryo to develop, but when I was told I had two, I was overjoyed. That is a moment I have no words to explain. We were so happy."

Kafeero adds: "There were people talking behind our back and they had to eat their words. I have no problem



Expert view. "It's not a primary or secondary specialised and as a result the nature of its practice being offered in Uganda, leave alone Africa,"

CALL FOR LEGITIMACY

The appeal. For the 12 years after its introduction in Uganda, there is no law to regulate the use of Assisted Reproductive Technology. "Just like the mobile phones the law is playing a catchup game with this technological advancement in the health sector," says Dr Robert Busingye, the president of the Uganda Fertility Association.