



Fertility patients vulnerable to social media overload of misleading data where evidence and algorithms collide

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BEIJING: Patient information overload dominated by misleading social media and marketing is causing patients experiencing infertility to have unrealistic expectations about treatment success often resulting in psychological distress.

“Never before have patients had so much information on fertility medicine, and never before has so much of it been wrong, incomplete or misinterpreted,” said Indian fertility specialist, Dr Madhuri Patil.

“Fertility medicine has changed in the age of information overload where data, anecdotes and algorithms collide.

“The information ecosystem is dominated by social media influencers, commercial marketing and clinic marketing, online forums, patient communities and non-peer reviewed sources.

“Misinformation can impact on patient treatment expectations, timing decisions, treatment adherence and doctor-patient trust.

“Fertility care is uniquely vulnerable. There are high emotional and financial stakes for patients striving for parenthood, and treatment expectations based on misinformation or misinterpretation can result in psychological distress and drop-out from treatment.”

Speaking at the 2026 Congress of the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction (ASPIRE) in Beijing, Dr Patil said the types of misinformation included:

- overestimation of IVF success rates;
- misinterpretation of age-related fertility decline;
- misunderstanding ovarian reserve testing;
- so-called natural or alternative therapies with unproven efficacy;
- add-on treatments marketed without strong evidence; and
- assumptions that elective egg freezing guarantees fertility.

“These issues matter because of the rapid growth of assisted reproductive technology and fertility services globally,” she said.

“Misinformation is no longer on the fringe. It is mainstream and patients are arriving at fertility clinics armed with half-truths, over generalised statistics and misplaced certainty.”

Dr Patil is a Bangalore-based fertility specialist, country representative to ASPIRE and former Chair of the ASPIRE Special Interest Group on Reproductive Endocrinology. She is President-elect of the Indian Society for Assisted Reproduction (ISAR) and Associate Editor of *Fertility and Sterility*, the official publication of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM).

She said counselling in assisted reproductive technology fails when population data averages are presented as individual treatment predictions.

“IVF is often a multi-cycle treatment,” Dr Patil explained. “Cumulative live birth rates – rather than IVF success rates reported per transfer – better reflect patient prognosis.

“Evidence must be interpreted for the individual patient, not an algorithm that may be technically correct, but clinically misleading.

“Social media amplification in particular results in emotional narratives outweighing statistical reality, IVF success stories being over-represented, simplified messaging and commercial bias.

“This results in patients having pre-formed treatment demands with significant clinical and personal consequences, including increased anxiety, decisional conflict and dropout.”

Dr Patil said it was important for fertility clinics to embrace a counselling framework in which:

- patients are asked what they believe about treatment;
- misinformation sources are identified;
- emotional concerns are validated;
- treatment options are reframed with evidence; and
- patients are provided with individualised prognosis.

“This is the recommended approach to evidence-based fertility care,” she said.

“It also requires standardised and transparent reporting metrics across clinics, regulation of fertility-related advertising, public education with improved patient decision aids, and fertility specialists occupying the digital space with accurate and consistent evidence-based messaging.”

Around 3,000 fertility specialists from across the globe are attending the ASPIRE Congress, which is being held at the China National Convention Centre in Beijing from 7 to 10 May.

Further information, go to <https://www.aspire2026.com>

INTERVIEW:

Dr Madhuri Patil is available for interview. To arrange, please contact Trevor Gill, ASPIRE Congress Media Relations Tel: (Australia) 61 418 821948 or email lighthousepr@adelaide.on.net