First U.S. Uterine Transplant Unsuccessful

By Lila Abassi — March 10, 2016

Recently, I wrote about the first ever uterine transplant clinical trial set to take place in the United States (click here for the story). Surgeons at the Cleveland Clinic were spearheading these efforts after successful results from Swedish trials.

In lieu of adoption or surrogacy, surgeons in Sweden had provided hope for women who suffer from infertility because of problems with their uterus — uterine factor infertility (UFI) — so that they could carry their own offspring.

Women who have undergone uterine damage, either from an infection or procedure, or born without a uterus, were made hopeful with the positive results from the Swedish trial at University of Gothenberg, where surgeons were able to successfully perform uterine transplants in nine women — resulting in five births.

The first surgery in the U.S. was performed on a 26-year-old recipient, known only as Lindsey, who is the mother of three adopted boys. She was told at the age of 16 that she could not have children. Last month she obtained a uterine transplant from a donor in her 30s who had died suddenly. Earlier this week, sadly, things took a sudden turn for the worse and the transplant had to be removed. Though specific details of exactly what went wrong were not provided and are still being investigated, it is most likely due to transplant rejection — a complication of solid organ transplants.

According to the Cleveland Clinic’s website, Lindsey stated, “I just wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude towards all of my doctors. They acted very quickly to ensure my health and safety. Unfortunately I did lose the uterus to complications. However, I am doing okay and appreciate all of your prayers and good thoughts.”

However, this setback will not hamper the trial efforts moving forward. There are nine more
women who are enrolled in the study and all have undergone extensive screening to identify them as viable candidates. Hope, for the 50,000 American women who have UFI, hinges on the success of this clinical study.

In addition to the Cleveland Clinic there are three other medical centers that are planning a similar clinical trial: Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston and the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances of the first transplant procedure, I reflect on all the emotions tied into these experimental surgeries – from the patients to the surgeons and the rest of the members of the team that we don’t hear from. Behind each failure we are a step closer to success and hopefully, much closer to enabling many women to have the opportunity to know what it’s like to carry her own child.

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