



THE HONG KONG CATHOLIC MARRIAGE ADVISORY COUNCIL

香港公教婚姻輔導會

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20 February, 2014

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Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Population Policy

26/F, Central Government Offices

2 Tim Mei Avenue

Tamar

Hong Kong

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy

On behalf of our Sub-Committee on Natural Family Planning, I would like to send you our response to your Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy.

Please feel free to contact me at 2810 1104 if you have any questions.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Angela Chiu

Executive Director

The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council

Views on Population Policy

Introduction

We are glad to hear that the Government considers taking more positive means to tackle the ageing problem and boosting up the fertility rate of the society. As a family service operator, we hope to see that the Government could carry out the policy based on a family friendly approach by fostering a supportive environment for people to form and raise their families. On the other hand, strong emphasis on strengthening the family core values like love, care, respect, harmony and unity are crucial to tie the family members and help promote a culture of loving families in the community.

Based on our rich experience in provision of family service, we would like to express our views upon raising birth rates and tackling infertility issue. The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (CMAC) is a non-governmental organization specialized in services supporting marriage and families. One of our major services is **Natural Family Planning (NFP)** which aims at assisting couples in spacing or achieving pregnancy. We have conducted an average of 700 consultations annually since 1966. Now we have seven service centres providing services to the public on a scheduled, systematic and territory-wide basis.

CMAC's Natural Family Planning services

The Natural Family Planning method (or fertility awareness method) CMAC is using is called sympto-thermal method which is scientifically based and medically grounded. This method involves the charting of woman's basal body temperature and the recording of daily cervical secretion. With provision of these two indicators, it helps determining the ovulation and fertile period of the woman. It consists of timed intercourse to coincide with the infertile days to avoid pregnancy, or with the fertile days to achieve pregnancy. It is also helpful in increasing the woman's awareness of their physical condition that may facilitate early detection of infertility problem. Fertility awareness can be learned and be applied in a manner acceptable to the couples. This method is not equivalent to the calendar method which is unreliable and archaic.

From the past 20 years experience, we notice that the number of couples coming to request for help in achieving pregnancy is increasing. In 1993-94, only 12% of our

couples (29 out of 242) came for achieving pregnancy whereas in 2012-13, 32% (56 out of 179) came for this purpose.

In addition to our service in Hong Kong, we have extended such service to Guangzhou since 1996. Now the symptom-thermal method is approved by the Beijing Family Planning Authorities as one of the effective means in family planning. A survey was conducted to evaluate its effectiveness in helping couples on family planning including achieving pregnancy in the first 3 years of our project. During this period of time, 973 couples attended our service in 2 centers. Though most of the couples came for the service of avoiding pregnancy and only 47 of them came with the problem of infertility. The result of the survey showed that 28 of them were successful in achieving pregnancy.

Evidence on the effectiveness of NFP as infertility treatment

Natural family planning is a well-proven treatment method for infertility and recurrent miscarriage. Natural Procreative Technology (NPT) is one of these modern methods, based on the Creighton Model FertilityCare System.¹ NPT is an integrative approach to infertility provided by NPT-trained family physicians resulted in substantial live birth rates with a minimal risk of twin or multiple births. This treatment method has been well established in North America (www.fertilitycare.org), Europe (www.fertilitycare.net), Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan (www.fertilitycare.com.au). Studies showed that NPT by trained family physicians was effective in treating infertility and miscarriage with live birth rates comparable to cohort studies of assisted reproductive technology, including in-vitro fertilization (IVF).^{2,3} In a cohort study in Ireland from 1998 to 2002, *J.B. Stanford et al* found that the crude proportion of first live birth for those completing NPT treatment was 25.5 per 100 couples and the cumulative proportion was 52.8 per 100 couples.² Another more recent retrospective cohort study in Canada showed that the crude proportion of first live birth was 38%, while the adjusted cumulative proportion was 66%.³ Despite the proven effectiveness of this method and the rising problem of subfertility, this service is currently not available in Hong Kong.

At the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, United Nations addressed the “Freedom of Choice” in family planning as an integral part of the population policy.⁴ The Hong Kong Family Planning Association is the major public agency providing family planning services. However, no data has been shown from their annual reports regarding the provision of any evidence-based

natural family planning method for limiting or achieving pregnancy. In Hong Kong, "Freedom of Choice" in subfertility treatment would never be completed without the availability of Natural methods. There are certainly a number of infertile couples who prefer the use of treatment methods other than the artificial ones like in-vitro fertilization or intracytoplasmic sperm injection. However, currently there are very limited options of subfertility service in Hong Kong. We believe that public cannot be deprived of the freedom and right to choose and obtain alternatives family planning methods.

Conclusion

Currently, the variety of subfertility treatment methods in Hong Kong is very limited. The Government should include and promote **Natural Family Planning Service** as one of the alternatives measures to treat infertility in legally married couples. This method is well proven with evidence and is cost-effective in treating subfertility. Hence, we strongly recommend the Government to put more resources on the implementation of natural family planning method in Hong Kong and consider subsidizing service providers to educate and help the public to access this green and reliable means in raising population fertility.

References

1. TW H. What is NaProTechnology ? Omaha : Pope Paul VI Institute Press; 2004.
2. Stanford JB, Parnell TA, Boyle PC. Outcomes from treatment of infertility with natural procreative technology in an Irish general practice. *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine : JABFM* 2008; **21**(5): 375-84.
3. Tham E, Schliep K, Stanford J. Natural Procreative Technology for Infertility and Recurrent Miscarriage. *Can Fam Physician* 2012; **58**(May): 267-74.
4. United Nations. Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994, 1995.