

CONVERSATIONS WITH... A Fertility Expert

Ladies and gentlemen, if you have nagging questions about your fertility, Dr Kelly Loi is your go to!

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An infertile couple is usually one step closer to realising their dreams of starting a family when they consult Dr Kelly Loi.

Her interest in fertility matters started as she wanted to find a way to preserve the eggs — by freezing them — of young women battling cancer in Singapore. For the past 17 years, this Oxford University Medical School-trained gynaecologist cum fertility expert has made it her life's work to give even the most desperate patients a glimmer of hope of conceiving.

"There have been a few cases where the patient was told that she hasn't much chance — but my view is that as long as you're not past menopause, there is still a chance," notes Dr Loi.

Today, she uses her female health and fertility expertise to ensure that women of all ages get the best medical treatment available using state-of-the-art facilities.

Her clinic at Paragon Medical Centre offers a holistic range of services that address gynae and health issues, fibroids, cysts, ovarian cancer, endometriosis, contraception, urinary incontinence, menopause and sexual health. She also performs Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI) and In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

"Right after I deliver a baby, there's always a sense that life is miraculous and it is gratifying to know that I have helped to play a part in bringing this life to the world."

A mum to three kids aged 7, 12, and 14, Dr Loi notes that every new life she helps to create and welcome safely into the world feels like a great achievement. "Right after I deliver a baby, there's always a sense that life is miraculous and it is gratifying to know that I have helped to play a part in bringing this life to the world."

Why specialise in fertility?

Fertility is a unique field where basic science research, laboratory expertise and clinical care are all closely interlinked. At the scientific level, I enjoy being able to work closely with the laboratory and to be able to apply scientific findings directly for the benefit of the patient. At the clinical level, it is gratifying to be able to help a sub-fertile couple conceive.

What is a typical work day like for you?

A typical day normally starts with morning ward rounds where I see my patients who have been admitted following deliveries or surgeries. This is followed by clinic appointments from around 9am to 6pm. In between, I may be called to attend deliveries or surgeries. Some are scheduled whilst others may be emergencies. In the evening at the end of the clinic sessions, I go through investigation results and write up medical reports. I then do an evening round to see patients in the ward before going home.

Every job comes with its own challenges — what are Dr Loi's? Read on to find out!



What are some challenges you face in your job?

Identifying ways to improve the success rates of patients undergoing fertility treatment. IVF protocols have been simplified, bearing in mind the stress of injections. Embryo selection methods have also advanced, allowing better selection of healthy embryos for transfer with the help of techniques such as blastocyst culture and laser-assisted hatching.

Another challenging area is fertility preservation. With the increasing incidence and prevalence of cancer, the issue of fertility preservation has become very important. It is important to be able to offer patients with cancer, the opportunity to preserve their ovarian tissue and eggs. This will allow them to be able to try to conceive when they have recovered.

On the personal front, to find enough time with the family is often a challenge. Being able to juggle work and being a parent is something all working parents have to grapple with.

How do you manage the expectations of your patients who are going through IVF?

It is important to go through their medical history thoroughly and discuss their needs and the benefits of going through IVF. I explain the process and procedures involved, the potential side effects, the success rates and the costs involved. It is important to understand that success rates are often tied to a woman's age but each cycle is different. While IVF may not be successful after the first cycle, it may be successful after the second attempt.

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Working with high-risk pregnancies and infertility must take an emotional toll on you. How do you manage?

I try to maintain a positive mindset and focus on doing my best for each and every patient. Spending time with the family also helps to put things in perspective.

What do you love most about your job?

Being able to help sub-fertile patients conceive and being a part of their journey to parenthood. Every day is a different experience for me. I see patients over a wide age range, presenting a variety of challenges. Apart from fertility and pregnancy, this includes young adolescent girls who have pubertal issues and older women with menopausal symptoms.

I also enjoy performing surgeries, including laparoscopic surgery (also known as "key-hole" or "minimally invasive surgery") for ovarian cysts, fibroids and other uterus-related problems. The role of laparoscopic surgery is now better understood and techniques have been refined to optimise the patient's gynaecological health before fertility treatment to improve her chances of success.

Complete these sentences...

The one superpower I would like to have is... To be able to move at the speed of light or teleport myself.

I often tell my patients to... Eat healthy and take folic acid.

I am happiest when... My fertility patients conceive and deliver healthy babies.

If I wasn't a gynae/fertility expert I would be... Either a researcher somewhere in a laboratory or a Tiger Mum at home!

Dr Kelly Loi is a gynaecologist and fertility specialist at Health & Fertility Centre for Women.