

NaProTechnology: A Breakthrough in Women's Health Care

We have come a long way.

When, thirty-six years ago, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* reaffirming the Catholic Church's teaching on married love and the regulation of birth, he was widely accused of being out of step with the modern age.

A conference held this past July in Omaha, Nebraska, called "Introducing NaProTechnology to the World," has proven, instead, that the Pope was a prophet well ahead of his time.

NaProTechnology — Natural Procreative Technology — is a new women's health science developed over three decades of research by Dr. Thomas Hilgers, an ob/gyn who decided to found the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction the day the Pope died in 1978.

Hilgers' creation of NaProTechnology is a direct response to an appeal made by Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*. The pontiff knew full well when he issued the encyclical that many Catholics would find it "difficult if not impossible" to abide by the Church's prohibition on artificial birth control, so he asked scientists to study the woman's natural cycle of fertility to find ways to make it easier for them.

Today, the results of the Pope's appeal and Hilgers' response can only be described as extraordinary.

NaProTechnology's Achievements

Among NaProTechnology's many breakthroughs, described in a 1,300-page medical textbook released at the Omaha conference, are:

- It is two to three times more successful than *in vitro* fertilization at helping infertile couples have children — at a fraction of the cost.
- It is 79% effective at helping women have a successful pregnancy after they have suffered repetitive miscarriages.
- Remarkably, it can help women learn they are at risk for a miscarriage even before one has occurred.
- NaProTechnology is 95% effective at treating PMS, a condition that plagues millions of American women each month.

- It is also 95% effective at treating Post-Partum Depression, which afflicts as many as one in five new mothers, often getting results within hours.
- NaProTechnology cuts the rate of premature birth nearly in half — thus helping reduce the incidence of birth defects.
- It allows for the accurate dating of the beginning of pregnancy, thus helping avoid end-of-pregnancy complications.
- NaProTechnology more than halves the recurrence of chronic pelvic pain, and it reduces the hysterectomy rate by a whopping 75%.

How has Dr. Hilgers been able to achieve such remarkable results?

Listening to the "Language of the Woman's Body"

Eschewing the high-tech/pill-based approaches that currently enthrall much of the ob/gyn profession, he has sought instead to listen to "the language of the woman's body."

This language is expressed through charts on which women are taught to keep a daily record of their fertility signs as part of the Creighton Model FertilityCare System developed by Dr. Hilgers.

NaProTechnology was born when Dr. Hilgers began to notice that women who came to his office complaining of certain symptoms shared similar charting patterns. He realized the charts were an invaluable diagnostic tool.

A hallmark of NaProTechnology is its insistence on addressing the underlying causes of women's health problems and working with the natural processes of the woman's body to restore them to their proper functioning.

Dr. Hilgers' work in helping restore women's hormonal systems to their natural balance has been phenomenal — and it has been made possible precisely because he insists that his patients learn to chart their menstrual cycles.

Women's hormones fluctuate from day to day, and unless a doctor knows exactly where a woman is in her cycle, he won't be in a position to accurately evaluate her hormone levels and take appropriate corrective action if problems are present.

Too often, today's ob/gyns are flying blind when it comes to the woman sitting in front of them. Aware that a woman needs progesterone support, they will often prescribe it beginning day 16 of her cycle, believing she should be post-ovulatory at that time. In fact, only half of women will have ovulated by then. Early provision of progesterone causes yet more problems for the woman.

Given that menstrual cycles vary so widely from woman to woman, it is simply irresponsible for ob/gyns not to encourage their patients to chart. The information gained from charting provides irreplaceable information that can guide the doctor in providing appropriate treatment for his patients.

Charting points the doctor to the underlying causes of a problem. Thanks to his focus on these underlying concerns, Dr. Hilgers has been able to make important advances in treating endometriosis, polycystic ovarian disease, blocked fallopian tubes, and hormonal disorders — all common conditions that can contribute to infertility.

Dr. Hilgers has demonstrated that a focus on the woman and restoring her natural functioning is far more effective in treating her concerns than his profession's widespread fascination with high-tech and pill-based approaches, which either seek to bypass the woman's problems or override her natural processes.

NaProTechnology's "Side Effects"

Not only is Dr. Hilgers' "natural" approach more effective at getting desired results, it has many important, beneficial "side effects" as well:

- By helping his patients conceive naturally, the pitfalls of IVF are avoided: multiple births result a third of the time when IVF works, and a host of recently published studies report that children born of IVF are twice as likely to suffer from birth defects than those conceived naturally.
- Many unnecessary surgeries can be avoided. To cite just one example, rather than treating a woman's underlying problems, many doctors today will order a hysterectomy, preferring instead just to get rid of her reproductive organs. More than 300,000 unnecessary hysterectomies are performed in the U.S. each year.

- The habit of daily observation by the woman — a practice that takes only half-a-minute several times a day — helps her catch the early signs of potential health problems, including some cancers, assuring her a higher rate of recovery.
- As a means of avoiding pregnancy, the Creighton Model is highly effective. A study published in the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* found its perfect use effectiveness to be 99.5% and its use effectiveness to be an impressive 96.8%. This compares favorably to the pill, of which Planned Parenthood's website states: "Of 100 women who use the Pill, only eight will become pregnant during the first year of typical use."

Offering What People Really Want

Finally, it is well worth noting that the natural solutions advocated by Dr. Hilgers are what people really want:

- According to a study conducted by City University, London, couples who conceive through IVF are far less likely to tell their children of their true origin than parents who adopt.
- Women who use the birth control pill as a means of avoiding pregnancy are more than twice as likely to stop doing so within a year compared with users of the Creighton Model FertilityCare System.
- Lastly, Creighton Model users report higher levels of self-esteem, spiritual well-being, and sexual intimacy than do users of the birth control pill.

The Message from Omaha, Nebraska

At the NaProTechnology conference in Omaha, the message to the wider ob/gyn profession could not have been more clear: it's time to reorient and catch up.

How ironic that it is a doctor, inspired decades ago by an "out-of-date" pope, who finds himself today at obstetrics and gynecology's very cutting edge.

— *Peter McFadden, President of the Cold Spring, NY-based Love & Responsibility Foundation, has been practicing the Creighton Model FertilityCare System with his wife for the past two years.*