

'How to Get Pregnant'

Advisory Board Member Silber has answers to infertility

One of the world's leading authorities in infertility and microsurgery is located right in St. Louis. A scientific pioneer, he performed the world's first microsurgical vasectomy reversal, as well as the first testicle transplant and first ovary transplant. With one of the most successful high tech programs in the world for couples with severe infertility problems, he draws hopeful parents from all around the world.

He's also a member of Webster's College of Arts & Sciences Advisory Board.

Meet Dr. Sherman J. Silber, author of the bestseller, *How to Get Pregnant*, and savior to countless couples who science once thought infertile. Where there is a cutting-edge reproductive technology, chances are Silber helped pave the way. He has been involved with the breakthroughs of in vitro fertilization, intracytoplasmic sperm injection, sperm retrieval from "sterile" men, tubal ligation reversal, donor egg pregnancy, surrogate pregnancy, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, and egg and embryo freezing.



Reflecting a universality not unlike Webster's recruiting mission, the list of Silber's patients includes "doctors, teachers, rock stars, secretaries, politicians, astronauts, movie stars, scientists, truck drivers, lawyers, migrant fruit pickers, CEO's, princes, and kings."

But he didn't begin his career seeking to be infertility's Thomas Edison. As Silber says, "To think that we chart our own course is a mistake."

A vascular surgeon and urologist by training, Silber provided public medical care to Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts in Alaska after his post-graduate training at Stanford and the University of Michigan. He then honed his microsurgical skills while teaching in Australia at the University of Melbourne Medical School and later at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco.

Among the interests he picked up from his travels was a taste for adventure and the study of reproduction in all forms of life. He still maintains a remote lodge in Alaska, where he studies the migration and reproductive cycle of salmon and bears. His interest in aboriginal peoples has taken him to the North Pole, to the Amazon, and the Australian outback, expeditions that have taught him, he says, that "modern man is willing to sacrifice joy and happiness for convenience and security."

But it was his unique mix of experiences in urology, organ transplants, and microsurgery that equipped him to try a challenge the world had never attempted before.

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Vasectomies were seen as irreversible in the mid-'70s, but Silber's skills in microsurgery convinced him to try it, and his success led him to world fame. He soon moved to St. Louis to open an infertility center at St. Luke's Hospital, where he knew the program would have the hospital's unwavering support.

Though based at St. Luke's, where he says the personal, clinical care for patients is unmatched, Silber operates at institutions all over the world and remains a very active member of the Belgian IVF team with whom he has pioneered several advances in infertility.

But all his work in infertility essentially addresses one issue particular to modern man: a worldwide epidemic of infertility.

“The biology of fertility in humans has not changed in the last 40,000 years,” says Silber, whose travels have included close study of the reproductive norms of aboriginal societies. “What has changed in the last few centuries is our lifespan and the age at which we first try to conceive.”

A major cause of infertility, Silber explains, is our modern desire to establish careers and financial security before trying to conceive in our mid-thirties. As time ticks away, the fabled “biological clock” and the aging process combine to whittle away one's chance of conceiving without medical intervention.

“You are born with all the eggs you will ever have, about 200,000 to 400,000,” Silber says. “And every month about a thousand of them will die. Thus as you get older, your eggs will decrease in both number and quality.”

But with the technologies and procedures that Silber has helped pioneer, almost any couple can get pregnant. The key is getting the right help and planning, and not getting sidetracked by irrelevant “diagnoses” and ineffective treatments dictated by what insurance companies will pay for.

The new procedures have taught doctors much about how fertilization really happens, allowing them to debunk old myths. “Almost anything that can go wrong in the arduous process which sperm and eggs normally have to go through can be bypassed with IVF and ICSI,” Silber says. Frustrated couples can now “avoid the emotional drain of literally years of fruitless testing and slingshot-style therapy.”

Silber's classic book, *How To Get Pregnant*, which he completely revised and updated in 2005, lays out for couples in clear, simple terms the basic information they need to understand their situation and achieve their goal of a happy, healthy baby.

With his vast experiences, Silber is a sought-after expert on issues ranging from aboriginal societies to dinosaur extinction to stem cell research. A consultant with MIT on the Human Genome Project, Silber is scheduled to speak at Webster's home campus next fall on the evolution of the X and Y chromosome and infertility.

In the meantime, though, Silber says Webster's continuing efforts in the sciences target important needs—particularly in areas such as nurse anesthesia and radiology “Paramedical studies like these will just continue to grow,” Silber says. “They have to, or else no one will be able to afford health care.”

Such insight and curiosity in a wide range of pursuits are what drew both Silber and his wife, Joan Elyn Silber, to the College of Arts & Sciences Advisory Board. Joan Silber is herself an author and community leader who earned her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in radio, television, and film.

Together, the two cover the intellectual map—and physically they've traveled the globe, too: their latest destination was Antarctica in January, 2006. As the sciences at Webster continue to grow, it appears Sherman and Joan Silber are walking on fertile ground.