

Mother sheds light on dark times of miscarriage

Posted: 12:00 a.m. Friday, Nov. 13, 2015

By [Nicole Villalpando](#) - American-Statesman Staff

Ricci Clepper, 33, describes her six miscarriages as “difficult and dark.” “There was a period of time when I was minimally engaged with my family, with my job.”

It happened in different ways; sometimes the baby didn’t have a heart beat at 10 or 11 weeks. One made it to 20 weeks before doctors found a knot in her umbilical chord, which cut off her oxygen supply. With that baby, Caroline, Clepper had to go through labor and delivery.



Ovagen Fertility is able to have much higher success rates in pregnancy after miscarriage with new technology, including the ability to freeze embryos quickly and thaw them out for future use. Ovagen Fertility

Each time, doctors would perform genetic tests on the baby to see whether they could find something wrong. Each time the tests came back negative.

In between, Clepper made it to full term with her daughter, Laurel, who is now 4. And she gave birth to a son, Henry, in December. Henry’s twin, though, didn’t have a heart beat at 11 weeks.

“Having Henry is great,” she says, “But it doesn’t erase or negate all the ones that we lost along the way.”



Ricci Clepper lost six babies before and between daughter, Laurel, and son, Henry.

People didn't know what to say to her. There is a misconception that she should not be sad because she had Laurel. One friend even suggested that she stop taking pregnancy tests so early so she wouldn't be so sad. "If I wouldn't know I was pregnant, it wouldn't hurt so much," she says her friend suggested.

Clepper learned to stop talking about being pregnant so she wouldn't have to turn around and tell people she had lost a pregnancy. In fact, with Henry, they waited until she was 34 weeks along to create a nursery, and they didn't name him until after he was born.

People who didn't know about her struggle kept asking when she was going to give her daughter a sibling.

She did find support in online groups and she found out which friends were true friends.

Clepper found some answers when she went to the Texas Fertility Center. Her doctor ordered multiple tests and sent her to a blood specialist. There, she learned she has Hashimoto's thyroiditis, in which the immune system attacks the thyroid gland. It is attributed to a high rate of miscarriage.

Miscarriage is more common than most people think, says Dr. Kaylen Silverberg of the Texas Fertility Center. In fact, he says, 1 in 3 or 1 in 4 pregnancies don't end up in a

baby. It usually looks like heavy bleeding, not just spotting, or the baby doesn't have a heartbeat at the next checkup.

A lot of women think they did something to cause a miscarriage. "Short of kickboxing and skydiving, there's nothing they can do to cause a pregnancy to miscarry," Silverberg says.

Just because a woman has had one miscarriage doesn't mean she is "doomed to miscarry over and over again," he says.

Women don't understand how common it is, he says, because people are not talking about it. "They suffer in silence, just like infertility."

While miscarriage is common, it's not normal, Silverberg says, and doctors should do follow up blood tests to check hormone levels as well as check the baby for an abnormality.

Sometimes there is something wrong with the baby chromosomally; sometimes there's something wrong with the mother's hormone levels; sometimes they never get an answer to the why.

Even without intervention, people who have had four to five miscarriages still have a 50 percent chance of having a healthy baby, Silverberg says, and with intervention like in vitro fertilization, it's 90 percent.

Silverberg and embryologist Tom Turner of Ovagen Fertility have been able to improve the chances of a healthy baby through major advances in the last five years, including more success when freezing and then thawing embryos to implant. They suspect that there will be even more advances in the next five years.

The Cleppers came through with two healthy babies, but that doesn't diminish the loss they still feel.

"There was plenty of time when I thought everyone could see it on me, 'There's that sad lady who lost all those babies,'" she says. But each time she would hear about a friend that had tried for a long time and finally had a baby, it would give her hope.

"When you've been down in the muck, whenever anyone has a victory, you start to feel excited," she says. "It gives you hope."