

Dear ~~XXXX Fertility Center~~,

This morning I am scheduled for my 3rd ovarian ultrasound. After each appointment, I get an email asking for feedback. I appreciate your willingness to consider ways to improve your practice, and I've been thinking very hard about how to express what I've experienced. It seems the best thing to do is simply tell you what this has been like for me so far.

The first time I had an ultrasound, I had been imagining the thing you see in movies, where the doctor sort of waves a wand at a pregnant lady and you see a picture. I found out the day before the appointment that it actually involves having a total stranger stick electrical equipment up your vagina. I was a little disconcerted. At the beginning of the appointment I asked if I could meet the doctor first, as in my non-fertility-center experience it's customary to keep your underwear on until you've been introduced. Although everyone seemed a little surprised by the request, there was no problem about managing this, and I strongly encourage you to make it a general practice.

During the first ultrasound I was told I had cysts on my ovaries. I had no idea that eggs form in cysts filled with fluid; I don't recall anyone mentioning that when I was in the seventh grade. As far as I'm concerned, a cyst is a lump and lumps are cancer, so I assumed I had cancer, cried in your parking lot for half an hour, and then went home and made out a will. Four days later I was told cysts are normal. Nice to know. Now we're all on the same page.

The second time I had an ultrasound, I was told to schedule it during my period. Evidently this is normal for all y'all, but to me, this is absolutely 100% not ok. I would be as comfortable dropping my pants in your lobby – it would actually be less horrifying and humiliating. I suspect it would be disconcerting for your receptionist, though, and I would certainly hate to make her day difficult. When I got up enough courage to ask how in the world this could possibly be ok, I was told “The doctors are used to it, and they don't mind. So it's ok.”

I'm sure I have nothing but goodwill for your medical staff but I wasn't actually concerned about the doctor's feelings in this situation. I know it can't be helped; it's just how things are and it has to be done. But I think you need a reality check about what “ok” means.

After the second ultrasound I was told to take birth control pills so I wouldn't get my period for 4 weeks, and then come back. I was very grateful to the doctor and nurse for taking the time to explain it all twice and then write it down, as at the time I was totally unable to concentrate on anything other than not throwing up.

Afterwards I went directly to the pharmacy where I actually had to argue with the pharmacist to get him to agree to give me enough pills to take them “continuously.” The pharmacist is lucky his head is still attached. Next I found that birth control pills are not covered by my insurance. They cost the equivalent of a week’s worth of groceries. I would have been glad to know this ahead of time. I got home later that day and found several bills for several hundred dollars of labwork. Again, whatever I have to do, I’ll do. But I specifically asked to be told when things were covered, and when they weren’t, as I do have to plan my budget fairly carefully.

The birth control pills caused me to break out, which I can live with; gain weight, which was depressing but not a big surprise; get irrationally and almost violently angry on a daily but otherwise unpredictable basis, which is annoying to my friends; and I could go on for pages about the nightmares, but at least they annoy only me.

I can’t actually remember why it was necessary not to get my period, but I remember the doctor said it was important. Imagine my surprise when I got my period anyway, the day before my appointment. Evidently this “breakthrough bleeding” is also ok.

I have several questions about this:

1. What!?
2. Why didn’t the birth control pills work?
3. If they don’t work, does that mean they actually don’t work for birth control either? Aren’t there a lot of women out there assuming that they do work?
4. If it doesn’t really matter that I got my period, then what was the \$50 nightmare-o-rama for?
5. I also wondered if there was even any point in coming in for the appointment, or if the whole thing had to be written off as a lab rat failure. I needed to call and ask what to do.

Every time I’ve needed to ask a specific question about what to expect in these procedures, I’ve run into the same problem. I cannot speak to a doctor or nurse unless it’s during business hours. I work during business hours, as many people do. That is actually why they call them business hours. How in the heck am I supposed to have this conversation at my desk? I work in an office with 5 other people, plus mailboxes for 30 and a general-use photocopier. During lunch, I could use the phone in the lounge, where the coffee machine is, but there are usually people there too, drinking coffee and eating lunch. Go figure. Maybe in *your* office it’s fine to discuss menstrual cycles on the phone, but I assure you this is not the case for most people. Again, I think you need a reality check about what is “ok” in a fertility clinic vs what is “ok” anyplace else.

I was told it was ok to simply be very vague. I don't think that's sensible; if I have a specific medical question that's relevant to my immediate health and my hopes for a family, I think I should probably ask the specific question. It's been suggested to me that I could use a cell phone, and go outside. I could. I could pretend to be on a coffee break, sneak outside, and hide in the parking lot. However, I was also told several months ago by one of the staff at ~~XXXX Fertility~~ that it's expected clients will make whatever financial sacrifice is necessary in order to pay for these procedures; I no longer have a cell phone. I also don't have tv or internet, as these are not utterly necessary, and I am resolved to do without air-conditioning until July 1. I was specifically told (and there's no need to name names here, as I've already spoken to this person) that clients at ~~XXXX Fertility~~ "want to have a baby so much that money just isn't an issue." However, I wonder if there's not some assumption being made that might be worth examination. Perhaps all your other clients stay home during the day, or perhaps they have their own office doors which they can close when they please. I'm sure I am the only one without a cell phone. (Funnily enough, I do remember the olden days before cell phones, and I wonder what your clients were expected to do back then. Perhaps they were not expected to ask questions?)

I've asked if I could email a nurse when I have questions, as this would be a lot more convenient and allow me to be specific without worrying about confidentiality. I was told that 1) most people prefer talking on the phone and 2) email's not convenient for the medical center staff.

I'm not most people and I don't give a red hot rat's rear end what's convenient for you. You're supposed to be taking care of me, not the other way around. And I'd be willing to bet I'm not the only person who feels this way. It's just that most of the time, I guess people are willing to put up with being treated like meat because they're used to it, or maybe they hope it will all be worth it later. Or maybe they get frustrated, or scared, or angry, but then they think, "but the doctors are all so nice, and it's not their fault – maybe it's just me...?" I'm putting up with a lot of stuff that's not ok with me, because I think it's necessary. However, I'm not inclined to put up with things that are not ok, *and* not necessary. Is this irrational? Overly fussy? Shall we blame it on the birth control pills? Although every single time – *every* time – I've had to deal with the ~~XXXX Fertility Clinic~~, I've been either frustrated or frightened into tears, I'm glad to report that as soon as I start crying, everyone is very sympathetic and helpful.

I have absolutely nothing but appreciation for the kindness and patience each individual staff member has shown me. I know I'm not anybody's favorite patient. But I'm also not meat. Your doctors and nurses are thoughtful and helpful. The receptionists are patient and reliable. The lady that did the blood draw did a great job. But your system is impersonal and cold, your institutional priorities are all askew, and you ought to do better.

Sincerely,
Rebecca