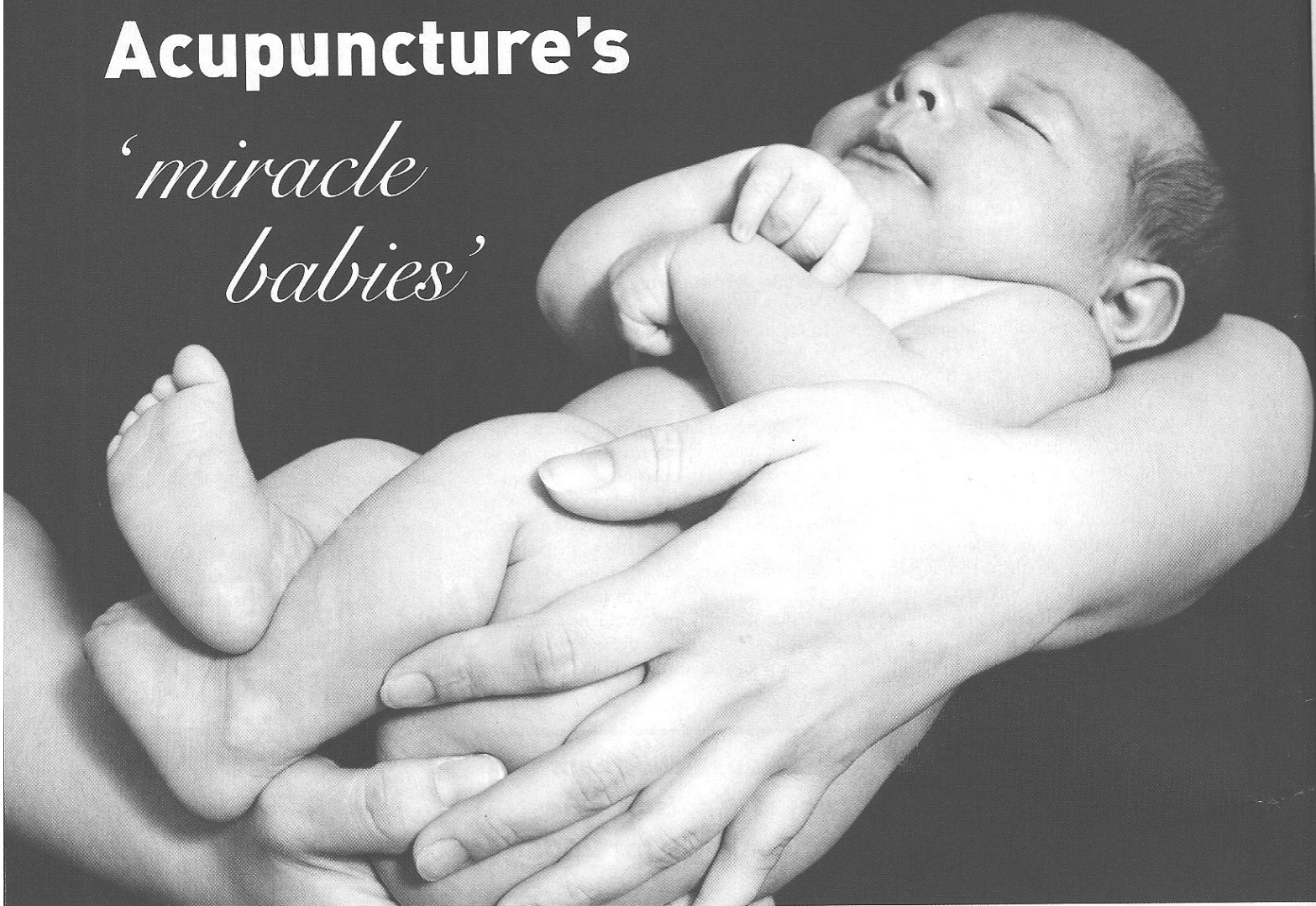


Acupuncture's

'miracle babies'



By Sharyn Alden

More and more women are turning to acupuncture to increase their chances of becoming pregnant. According to the principles of traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture works by increasing energy along pathways in the body called meridians.

When used as an adjunct to infertility treatments, acupuncture balances the body's energy, increases the blood flow through the uterus, and optimizes the possibility for pregnancy.

What follows is one family's story using acupuncture for infertility.

The journey to motherhood

A year ago **Michelle Staff Smith** says she wasn't an "acupuncture believer," but now she loves talking about what acupuncture has done for her.

Smith and her husband Kevin tried to get pregnant for five years. They went through all the traditional routes including intrauterine inseminations at UW's Infertility Clinic. She became pregnant the first time by using Clomid and IUI, but she miscarried at 16 weeks. After grieving the loss of her child, the couple tried three more rounds of Clomid and intrauterine inseminations without success.

Taking the drug Clomid to induce ovulation was not a favorable experience—it made her so anxious she was put on an anti-depressant medicine. "We decided not to continue the fertility treatments because I could not function at home or work due to the negative affects of Clomid," she says.

During her grieving process, Smith decided to do something good for herself. She signed up for a yoga class at **Group Health Cooperative's Complementary**

Medicine and Wellness Center, and also learned the clinic offers acupuncture treatments for infertility.

She began seeing GHC acupuncturist **Michelle Buchanan** every two weeks. "When I started working with her, I learned I had too much heat in my system. She changed my diet—I cut down on sweets, and incorporated a natural-based diet that included herbs to increase blood flow to the uterus." As a side benefit, after one month of acupuncture treatments Smith's horrible menstrual cramps disappeared.

Still, after three months she hadn't become pregnant even though Buchanan assured her she was doing all the right things.

The following month the couple decided to move forward and try to adopt a baby. "But during the same week that I called the adoption agency, I found out I was pregnant."

At this writing, Smith, 37, a teacher at Orchard Ridge Elementary School, is nearly nine months pregnant. Her baby boy, due March 14, will be delivered at St. Marys Hospital.

Today, she tells women to consider acupuncture for infertility. "I found the treatment environment so comfortable—the lights were dimmed and soft music was playing—that sometimes I fell asleep." While she occasionally felt a "heat-like" sensation when a needle was inserted, usually she didn't feel much.

"Acupuncture has been life-altering," she says.

Helping women become pregnant

Buchanan began a focused practice helping women become pregnant five years ago. She became interested in using acupuncture for infertility when she knew several women who were unable to get pregnant. "I knew couples who were crushed when they couldn't have children," she says. "I wanted to do something about changing people's lives. Their pain was a powerful motivator for me."

Buchanan's results, using acupuncture and herbal treatments, are impressive. She

says over 100 women she has worked with have had healthy babies and between 40 and 60 percent of her patients have tried everything but acupuncture before walking in the door.

"Of the patients who have not taken Western fertility drugs, our success rate is between 60 and 80 percent," Buchanan says. "With women who have taken Western medicine and fertility drugs, the success rate of having a healthy baby is about 50 percent."

At the outset, Buchanan does an in-depth health history and may make dietary recommendations and offer advice about meal planning, or recommend nutritional supplements like antioxidants to produce cervical mucus to promote the movement of the egg.

Buchanan also uses acupuncture for women who are going to have in vitro fertilization treatments at UW Hospital and other fertility clinics around the state. "Preparing women with acupuncture increases their success rate for pregnancy," she says.

It's another way acupuncture is helping families realize their dream of having their own bundle of joy.

Sharyn Alden is a Madison-based writer.