Many of the rapid responses point out that there is a paucity of evidence of the risks of ovarian stimulation and pregnancy for people like Tommy. Even if all the risks were quantifiable, they may be ignored by couples whose lives become dominated by their desperation for a child. In reproductive medicine we see couples who risk their relationships, jobs, homes, and health for an attempt at in vitro fertilisation. At what level of risk do we say no?

Competing interests: None declared.

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Commentary: how can experts and novices learn together?

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Rapid responses to this case have been less numerous but perhaps more erudite and thought provoking than we have come to expect from previous interactive case reports.¹ Could it be that the rapidest responders' expertise in evidence based medicine, diabetes, and reproductive medicine deterred others from contributing? We know that experts and novices learn in different ways and that experts are not always the best teachers for novices,² but what about their interaction when working and learning together?

More advanced learners can inhibit contributions from the less expert in schools, and this effect, postulated in medical education, has been observed in learning about evidence based health care.³ Benner comments that "proficient performers are best taught by use of case studies where their ability to grasp the situation is solicited and taxed."² Medical case based learning is used at disparate levels of expertise, ranging from small group work to grand rounds. The trick is to ensure that learners at different stages can each work at their own level without disrupting the learning of others.

What does this mean for medical educators? Firstly, a skilled group facilitator may be able to hold the ring and balance the learning to ensure that everyone goes away from a learning encounter with something learnt, but they may learn sequentially rather than simultaneously. Novices may learn from seeing how experts develop their reasoning, and experts exposed to the

thought processes of the less experienced may reflect on their unconscious expertise.

Much of modern educational thinking about professional learning is founded on Lave and Wenger's notion that learning is "a process of participation in communities of practice, participation that is at first legitimately peripheral but that increases gradually in engagement and complexity."⁴

BMJ interactive case reports attempt to stimulate the formation of a transient community of practice on the web pages. Gilly Salmon coined the term "cafélatia learning" to describe online communities, such as those with a common professional interest, learning by being intellectually extended by dialogue and challenge from others.⁵ She has valuable advice for those facilitating e-learning in this context.

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Commentary: dilemma for patient and clinicians

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The story of Maria Tomasa is deeply moving.¹ Tommy went through a difficult process to find support in her wish to have a child. Then she risked her health in this pregnancy. Finally, she accepted that her story be told and commented on by strangers. All three steps show admirable courage. The authors must also be commended for publishing a case highlighting several issues on which reasonable people may disagree. Without attempting definitive answers, we comment on a few points illustrated by this story.

One salient element is that the decision to go ahead with assisted reproduction was so much harder than that of supporting a naturally occurring

pregnancy. Yet opposing natural pregnancy to assisted reproduction may not be ethically relevant. No woman becomes pregnant without an intervention by another human being. What changes is who acts and the fact that technology is required. But technology is not clearly "unnatural". It obeys the laws of nature and was invented by the human mind, which is itself a product of nature. Uses of technology can, of course, be good or bad, but that is a different question.

Who acts, however, is a relevant point. With assisted reproduction, the tools of medical decision making come into the picture. The true difficulty of this situation lies in their limitations.