



## **Transcript:** Strengthening Infertility Services in Title X Programs

**Fonda** Hello, everyone. This is Fonda Ripley with the Reproductive Health National Training Center, and I'm pleased to welcome you all to today's webinar on Strengthening Infertility Services in Title X Agencies.

A reminder that the QFP defines the range of services that should be offered in a family planning setting and is the guideline for Title X agencies. The QFP emphasizes the role of helping clients to achieve pregnancy as well as to prevent pregnancy and describes how to provide pregnancy testing and counseling, and highlights the role of quality improvement in improving health outcomes.

Title X services are guided by the expectations of the Title X statute, regulations, and legislative mandates, and the Title X program priorities, which include providing care in a manner that is client-centered, culturally and linguistically appropriate, inclusive, trauma-informed, protects the dignity of the individual, and ensures equitable and quality service delivery, consistent with the national standards of care. So with this framing in mind, I want to pass the mic to Meg for her to share information on how family planning agencies and staff can strengthen their provision of infertility services and referrals to support clients experiencing infertility.

**Meg** Thanks, Fonda. So over the years, we've heard from many Title X staff that providing basic infertility services is challenging and it can feel frustrating because of the many barriers that confront both the program, and the providers, and the clients as well. But there is a lot that we can do within the Title X setting to support a client in achieving a healthy pregnancy and in their journey to build a family. By understanding the scope of basic infertility services, by strengthening the provision of those services, and by providing referrals to clients experiencing infertility, Title X staff can help individuals and couples build the family that they envision. So for the next few minutes, we'll be discussing how Title X programs can strengthen their provision of basic infertility services. The RHNTC has developed a toolkit that brings together guidance on how to strengthen infertility services and resources to help along the way.

A solid first step in strengthening your program's infertility services is to identify what you're doing well and where your program could improve. So to do this, we need a basic baseline

understanding of the Title X requirements for basic infertility services as described by the QFP and national recommendations. From here, you can take a close and thorough look at your program's services, policies and protocols, and go from there to determine the extent to which they align with the Title X program expectations, professional guidelines, and recommendations. So using a self-assessment checklist like the one you see on your screen here can help you see clearly what your program does well and where the opportunities for improvements lie so that you can best direct your focus. Next, protocols.

Protocols should contain a brief explanation of what constitutes infertility and should spell out the components of the history, the physical exam, counseling considerations, and the plan of care. The development of a thorough and up-to-date protocol can be daunting, but you do not have to reinvent the wheel. The National Clinical Training Center for Family Planning has developed a protocol template that programs can tailor to reflect their own practice settings. Talking with clients about infertility can be really hard. We want to say the right things, we want to be reassuring, and we want to share sincere care and concerns. So here are some tips for talking with clients who are experiencing infertility. First, show your interests by focusing on them and only them when talking with them about their infertility, look them in the eye and don't multitask. Ask them what they need and how you can support them. Include both partners in the discussion if two are present. When appropriate, gently encourage them to consider therapy and offer referral to a therapist who has experience with clients struggling with infertility. Be informed about next steps in evaluation and treatment and support them in pursuing the path that feels right to them.

Sometimes, our helpful suggestions can be felt as insensitive. So here are a few things not to say. First, don't tell them to relax. This can come across as judgmental, and it minimizes the complexity and the significance of what they're experiencing. Don't try to deflect with comments that highlight the supposed upside of not having a child, like just enjoy being able to sleep in right now or kids are really expensive. Don't tell them it will happen. In truth, we don't know that it will happen. There's no guarantee, and they know this too. So telling them that it will happen may come off as trite and dismissive. This is a difficult and a potentially uncomfortable conversation. Don't use humor to try to lighten the atmosphere and don't be crude by saying things like are you sure the little guys are swimming? Finally, don't push adoption or other solutions. They need to work through many issues before they'll be ready to make an adoption decision or choose another family building option.

Health educators and clinic teams can also teach clients about conditions and environmental exposures that may influence fertility. For example, we can educate clients on the link between hypertension and impaired fertility. We can also share information on how exposure to endocrine disruptors may interfere with the hormones in our body to potentially impact reproductive health and fertility along with actions that clients may take to reduce their exposure. The images on this slide are clips from two RHNTC videos. Hypertension and fertility and understanding endocrine disruptors and fertility.

Finally, when necessary, provide clients with referrals and resources that go beyond what you can offer at your site. In addition to linking clients to specialist care for clinical infertility services, family planning agencies can provide clients with information, education, and resources on the social, emotional, financial, and other aspects of navigating infertility and treatment. Agencies seeking to strengthen their referral system can call upon the *Establishing and Providing Effective Referrals for Clients: A Toolkit for Family Planning Providers*. To make providing these referrals easier, it may be helpful to spend a little time pulling together a list of local resources including support groups that you can draw upon when you need it. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has a health professional locator on their website, which may help clients identify fertility care providers. We'll chat that link in now. People experiencing infertility may find strengths, hope, courage, and information through the stories of others.

These stories can help them navigate their own journeys, but people may not know of someone who has experienced infertility that they feel comfortable talking with. That's why providing information about local and online support groups can be really helpful. There are online resources that can help people connect with others who have experienced infertility. Websites like RESOLVE, My Fertility Story, and the National Infertility Awareness Week resources can bring community and personal connection to people, which can provide irreplaceable comfort and support.

So I have shared a lot, but there is so much more. Please take some time to explore the infertility services in Family Planning Care toolkit.