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Cancer makes road to motherhood a difficult journey  
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Special Correspondent

June 28, 2004

Sara Levine Morales, 34, has already suffered just trying to become pregnant, yet the possibility of having a baby continues to elude her.

When she met her husband, Raymundo Morales, 37, five years ago, he pursued her, she said. The couple, who live in Pembroke Pines, both work in the travel industry and met at work.

Shortly after their marriage in April 2001, Morales went to Dr. Ellen Wood, a Hollywood fertility doctor.

"At first she said the cause was ovarian cysts," Morales said of her difficulties conceiving. "I thought, 'Oh well, the cysts were in the way and that's why I can't get pregnant.'"

But the diagnosis proved much more serious. A week later, a follow-up examination showed the mass had grown considerably and probably was cancerous.

The couple eventually learned that Sara had ovarian cancer, rare but not unheard of at her age.

"Since it was diagnosed early, I thought there was a chance it hadn't spread to the uterus, and because she wanted to have children, I asked the surgeon to do everything he could not to remove it," Wood recalls. "A few years ago, leaving the uterus would not have been considered, but the success rate has risen so quickly, it's a great option for many people who want to have children."

When she went to the hospital to check on her patient, Wood was elated to see that Morales' uterus was cancer-free and had not been removed. "I opened the chart and read that she had a uterus. I knew she could have children in two years if she was cancer-free," she said.

The plan was to have Sara become pregnant by using donated eggs. The donor takes fertility drugs to produce many eggs at once. Removing the eggs from the donor's ovaries involves a minor surgical procedure. The eggs are mixed with sperm from the intended father in the laboratory. If embryos result, they are transferred into the mother's uterus and the pregnancy hopefully is carried through birth.

Having a relative or friend who doesn't expect a fee to be the donor reduces the price of the procedure. Insurance doesn't cover all costs, and anonymous donors are usually paid, typically around \$12,000 to cover medical costs and the donor fee, Morales said.

Morales' donor, concerned about the medical implications and physical discomfort from the procedure, backed off, leaving the couple to scramble to raise enough money to proceed.

"For the donor, the procedure is not simple. And there are a lot of dangers for them, and I understand my donor decided not to participate," Morales said. "Dr. Wood keeps assuring me that we are going to get through this. But my biological clock has been sped up by the cancer and treatment. For people like myself, it's a race."

Morales said she realizes that a child would not carry her genes, only her husband's.

"He is such a caring, loving individual, I want it to be his child," she said. "Adoption is an option, but I want some of his genes to be in our child. It will be my special gift to him."

Do you have a recent story of hope? Have you overcome adversity in raising a family, been involved in a rescue or beaten the odds medically? Contact Steve Plunkett at [splunkett@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:splunkett@sun-sentinel.com) or 954-356-4775.

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