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SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS: 20 YEARS OF FERTILITY TRENDS AMONG ACTIVE DUTY AND VETERAN SERVICEMEMBERS SEEKING FERTILITY CARE AT A MAJOR URBAN FERTILITY CENTER

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Title: SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS: 20 YEARS OF FERTILITY TRENDS AMONG ACTIVE DUTY AND VETERAN SERVICEMEMBERS SEEKING FERTILITY CARE AT A MAJOR URBAN FERTILITY CENTER

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Nothing to disclose. No off-label or otherwise non-approved product use.

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OBJECTIVE: There are 18.6 million active duty, reserve, and veteran servicemembers in the United States (U.S.). Access to high-quality fertility care can be challenging for millions of servicemembers, especially with only six military facilities providing fertility services. This study aims to explore trends in military servicemembers seeking fertility care by examining service history, medical history, and access to care.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This retrospective case series was performed at an academic, private urban fertility center between 2003 and 2022. Servicemembers were identified using natural language processing to isolate keywords indicating past or present military service or utilization of a military-affiliated insurance. Servicemembers were classified as utilizing military insurance if they presented VA health coverage or TRICARE insurance when undergoing treatment. If neither of these insurances were presented, servicemembers were classified as using private insurance. The primary outcome was access to fertility care for servicemembers. Secondary outcomes were progression to treatment, insurance status, and time from consult to the first cycle. Patient demographics, deployment-related information, and pre-, intra-, and post-treatment outcomes were collected. Descriptive statistics were performed to determine specific trends.

RESULTS: The study evaluated 112 military servicemembers who sought fertility care. Of the qualifying patients, 23.21% (n=26) were female servicemembers and 76.79% (n=86) were male servicemembers. 41.96% (n=47) were active duty, 10.71% (n=12) reserve duty, and 46.43% (n=52) veterans. Servicemembers and partners were racially diverse and predominantly married (91.96%). The average ages of female and male servicemembers during consultation were 35.03±4.96 and 36.85±7.11 years, respectively. Military insurance was utilized by a minority of servicemembers (32.14%, n=36). The majority of servicemembers (69.64%, n=78) presented for consultation between 2015 and 2022. 102 servicemembers (91.07%) progressed to treatment completing at least one treatment cycle. Of those who did not pursue treatment, 70% (n=7) used military insurance. Of the servicemembers utilizing military insurance, the average time from consult to first cycle was half as long (0.42±0.58 years) compared to those utilizing private insurance (0.90±2.67 years). 55.36% (n=62) of servicemembers achieved at least one pregnancy and 46.43% (n=52) achieved at least one live birth.

CONCLUSIONS: U.S. military servicemembers pursuing fertility treatment are an often-overlooked demographic. Of nine million enrolled veterans, less than 50% of the veteran population use VA health services. Our study found an increasing trend in the number of fertility care consults by servicemembers over time but more research is needed. Our data demonstrates many servicemembers use alternate means outside of the military and VA health systems to build their families.

IMPACT STATEMENT: Fertility care for U.S. military servicemembers requires further review of current policies to improve coverage with the goal of supporting our troops’ ability to build their families.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. Samantha Estevez is a fellow in Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City and Reproductive Medicine Associates of New York. Dr. Estevez earned her Bachelor of Arts in History and Women’s Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she graduated summa cum laude and with her honor’s thesis in Japanese history. She completed her medical school education at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago and her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra Northwell in New York. Throughout her medical training, Dr. Estevez has received numerous awards, including Northwestern’s Global Health Initiative Scholarship, the Northwell Health Culture of Care in Action Award, and induction into the Gold Humanism Honors Society. As a resident, Dr. Estevez was the Chief Resident of Research and a member of the residency interview committee. She has authored numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and presented at several prestigious conferences, including the American Society for Reproductive Medicine Annual Meeting, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Annual Meeting, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Annual Scientific Symposium. Her research and clinical interests include LGBTQIA+ fertility, access to care for underrepresented minorities, reducing health disparities, and fertility preservation.

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Biographical Sketch Dr. Tia Jackson-Bey is a reproductive endocrinologist and infertility specialist who cares for patients at RMA of New York in Brooklyn, New York and an assistant professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Science at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She is board certified in OB/GYN and REI. Dr. Jackson-Bey’s professional interests include providing fertility related education, advocating for those affected by infertility, and mentoring the next generation of reproductive health providers. Dr. Jackson-Bey completed her undergraduate education at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. She earned her medical degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, while simultaneously completing her Master’s in Public Health from New York Medical College School of Health Behavior and Practice. Dr. Jackson-Bey completed her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Duke University Medical Center and joined RMA of New York after finishing her fellowship in Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility at University of Illinois at Chicago. Dr. Jackson-Bey is passionate about reproductive justice and increasing access to fertility care for all. She works with various organizations and medical societies to enhance fertility options for underrepresented minorities, reduce health disparities and improve access to care. She was
appointed to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force, now formal Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM). She holds leadership roles the health disparities and access to care special interest groups in ASRM. She has presented nationally at ASRM, NMA, ACOG, and APGO-CREOG on a variety of fertility related topics. She is often featured on media-television, podcasts, print- as a content expert in reproductive medicine. Dr. Jackson-Bey is a dedicated fertility expert, who is committed to family building, fertility preservation, reproductive awareness, and great outcomes for all patients.

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Biographical Sketch Danielle E. Soltesz, M.B.A, M.P.H.: Danielle Soltesz is the President of Reproductive Medicine Associates of New York (RMA of New York) a Manhattan-based fertility clinic with over 250 employees and 17 doctors in 6 locations. Danielle earned her B.S. in public health from Rutgers University, her M.B.A. in healthcare finance from Rutgers Business School and her M.P.H. in health systems and policy from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Danielle has extensive experience in healthcare practice operations, physician practice growth and development, and driving strategic change in the healthcare setting. Danielle prides herself on putting the patient first in everything she does by being a patient advocate. Danielle lives in New Jersey with her husband and three kids. When she is not working, you will find her at the Jersey Shore soaking up the sun with a book in her hand.
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