

Duke University Medical Center

Intercom

VOL. 25, NO. 25

JUNE 23, 1978

DURHAM, N.C.

Fatherhood no picnic either, psychiatrists say

By David Williamson

(Editor's Note: David Williamson, medical writer in the Office of Public Relations, expects to become a father for the first time in November. While experiencing some insomnia, he has not gone through the other "sympathy symptoms" of pregnancy he writes about here. His wife Sandy would unselfishly have shared some with him.)

Just about everyone knows that pregnant women can experience a number of unpleasant symptoms during the nine months before they give birth.

Among these side effects of impending motherhood are "morning sickness," headaches, loss of appetite, cramps and backache.

Not so well known, however, is that husbands sometimes experience the same symptoms during the months before they become fathers, according to Drs. Jesse O. Cavenar Jr. and Nancy T. Butts, psychiatrists who have studied and written about the phenomenon.

Cavenar is an associate professor of psychiatry here and chief of psychiatry at the VA Hospital. Butts, who completed a residency in psychiatry here last year, now maintains a private practice in Chapel Hill.

More common than generally recognized

In a pre-Father's Day interview, the two said they believe that physical reactions in men to their wives' pregnancies or even desire for pregnancy

are much more common than is generally recognized.

The causes, they said, may be as varied as the symptoms and range from mild fears about finances and being a good father to deep-seated personality conflicts going back to the husband's own childhood.

"I think it's important for men to realize that some emotional upheaval around the time of pregnancy is to be expected," Butts said. "But instead of pushing these thoughts and feelings under the rug, they should discuss them with their wives."

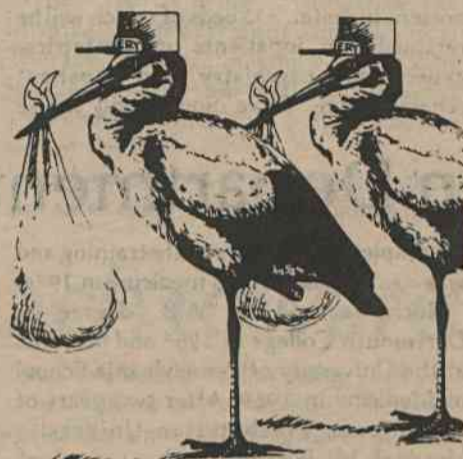
In most cases, talks between spouses will be enough to dispel a man's anxieties about becoming a father, she said. More extreme cases may call for psychotherapy that can last just a few sessions or many years, requiring hospitalization.

Fatherhood stress

When pregnancy-like symptoms arise in expectant fathers, and no physical cause can be found, Cavenar said psychiatrists call the condition the Couvade syndrome.

The disorder derives its name, he said, from the French word meaning "to brood" or "hatch." Anthropologists in the last century used that word to describe a ritual still practiced by certain primitive tribes in South America and Africa.

"Essentially, the ritual consists of the husband of the pregnant woman retiring to his bed during his wife's labor,



simulating or experiencing labor pains, and receiving attention that would ordinarily be given to a woman," he said.

"The wife may be lucky if she has one attendant because almost everyone is clustered around the husband," Cavenar said. "There are several different theories about why this has been done, but I think

it at least shows their appreciation of how stressful becoming a father can be."

Not so humorous

While the Couvade syndrome usually disappears around the time of delivery, occasionally it does not. Anyone who thinks a husband's fears are humorous would change his mind if he knew the heartache those fears can bring into a marriage.

In a scientific paper they wrote last year, the two psychiatrists were the first to point out that unresolved rivalries with younger brothers or sisters may be a major factor when the syndrome worsens after delivery.

In the cases they described, four men were incapacitated to varying degrees after their wives announced pregnancies.

Three of the men recovered after they came to understand that their difficulties resulted from subconsciously associating their unborn infants with younger

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Pioneer in vitreous surgery named ophthalmology chairman

One of the world's most highly respected eye surgeons has accepted an appointment as chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology here.

Dr. Robert Machemer, currently

associate professor of ophthalmology at the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, will succeed Dr. Joseph A. C. Wadsworth in the position Sept. 1.

Wadsworth, who founded the Duke Eye Center, will continue his practice and teaching responsibilities at Duke. In March he turned 65, the mandatory age at which department heads give up administrative duties.

Developed revolutionary new instrument

Almost eight years ago, Machemer and his colleague Jean-Marie Parel began developing a revolutionary new instrument they named the VISC (vitreous-infusion-suction-cutter). Their device allowed eye surgeons for the first time to remove and replace the vitreous — a normally transparent liquid that helps the eyeball maintain its spherical shape — when that liquid clouds up and blocks vision.

Since then, vitreous surgery has developed into an ophthalmic specialty that provides treatments for many eye diseases previously considered untreatable. Among these are the late stage of diabetic retinopathy, one of the possible complications of diabetes and a leading cause of blindness.

Through his subsequent scientific writings, instructional films and lectures, Machemer has taught hundreds of other eye specialists in this country and abroad to perform the operation safely. He is also known for his research that established a good experimental model for retinal detachment, a vision-threatening condition that sometimes results from injury or severe nearsightedness.

Native of Germany

Author of more than 120 papers and a textbook on vitreous surgery, Machemer,

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WHAT ARE THESE PEOPLE DOING?—This activity, taking place behind the hospital, may look a little strange, but there's a perfectly logical explanation of what is going on and why. You can find out by turning to

page 4. In the meantime, here's a clue: June is National Recreation and Parks Month.