



*Fertility Society of Australia  
2018 Annual Scientific Meeting, Melbourne 9-12 September*

Media Release – 12 September 2018

## **Women considering IVF cautioned about potential impacts of taking complementary medicines**

Women undergoing IVF who take oral complementary medicines to enhance their chances of becoming pregnant may be doing more harm than good, according to research presented at a major fertility conference in Melbourne.

Speaking today at the annual conference of the Fertility Society of Australia, Dr Violet Kieu of Monash Health said the research involved women undergoing their first cycle of IVF and the effects of herbal or dietary supplements such as Chinese medicines, fish oil, liver detox, probiotics, antioxidants and maca root.

“This was a pilot study of 25 IVF patients looking at the effect of oral complementary medicine on egg fertilisation, embryos and pregnancy rates,” she said.

“Among the patients there were no statistical differences in factors such as age, body mass index or primary infertility, which is defined as the inability to conceive after a year of unprotected intercourse.

“However, just over half of the participants were users of a wide range of complementary medicines.

“We compared outcomes of a first cycle of IVF among the users and non-users of the oral complementary medicines.

“While there was no difference in the number of eggs collected, there was a higher egg fertilisation rate in the women who did not use these products.

“From the embryos resulting from the first cycle of IVF, there was no difference in the clinical pregnancy rate – or the foetal heart beat six weeks after fertilisation – between users and non-users of oral complementary medicine.

“However, the key point is that the difference in egg fertilisation rates means that further research is required to determine if this association with oral complementary medicines is causative, as it may ultimately have an impact on live birth rates.

“This is a small pilot study, but it does expose some potentially significant effects of oral complementary medicines in women undergoing IVF – effects that they may not be aware of.”

Dr Kieu said the results warranted caution and the need for further research in oral complementary medicines on IVF outcomes given as many women are using these products.

“Oral complementary medicines are not regulated in Australia and there have been studies showing some levels of contamination in these products by animal or plant substances or other pharmaceuticals,” she said.

“It is recommended that women considering IVF should have a discussion with their doctors about the use of oral complementary medicines.”

The other researchers in the study were Associate Professor Martin Healy and Professor Beverley Vollenhoven.

Leading fertility specialists from Australia and overseas are attending the conference at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre to explore latest developments to help people experiencing infertility, which is defined as the failure to conceive after a year of unprotected intercourse, or the inability to carry pregnancies to a live birth.

In Australia, an estimated one in six couples experience infertility, the causes of which are equally shared between male and female partners.

**Interview: Dr Violet Kieu is available for interview. To arrange, please contact Trevor Gill, FSA Media Relations, on 0418 821948 or e-mail [lighthousepr@adelaide.on.net](mailto:lighthousepr@adelaide.on.net)**