

## Treatment for Couple's Pain Makes Laughter Conceivable

Pharma Marketing Is a Less-Than-Noble Art, but This Infertility Drug Ad Is Amusing and Sympathetic

Posted by [Bob Garfield](#) on [03.15.10](#)

This is about a funny, knowing and smart direct-to-consumer drug campaign now being tested in Baltimore. But first, just a quick reminder that pharma marketing is a cesspool.

Negative clinical data are suppressed. "Thought leaders" are suborned into attaching their names to pharma-authored studies, and to promoting unauthorized off-label uses. Medical journals are co-opted by advertising and reprint sales. Practicing physicians are bribed to write prescriptions by pretty pharma detailers with free samples and long legs.



**Marketer:** EMD Serono

**Agency:** Mono, Minneapolis



To the bill of indictment, here we're expected to add direct-to-consumer advertising, one of the great bogeymen of our culture, for supposedly pushing pills as the solution to all problems, real and imagined, and for turning America into a nation of over-medicated zombies.

But that isn't so. Tens of millions of people have received successful treatment for disorders large and small that would have gone unattended had not they made aware of the pharmaceutical possibilities. DTC has

its problems, but we believe they lie in the state of managed care and the way medicine is practiced in frantic five-minute bursts: patient walks in with a shopping list and it's easiest for the doc to a) fill the order, and b) receive points toward that Scottish golf junket.

So while we're as disgusted as anybody about the flaccid-penisation of our airwaves, we see beyond ED overkill to the greater good. Medicine can help people, but only if they see a doctor who can prescribe it.

Enter, then, EMD Serono and Mono, the Minneapolis branding agency. They are testing a campaign called "Increase Your Chances," aimed at young couples going through the heartbreak of infertility. It's a comedy.

Yes, a charming series of warmly funny videos about a condition that is frustrating, painful, embittering and not remotely amusing in any way to the afflicted. But that's the genius of this campaign, online at [IncreaseYourChances.org](#): It is totally understanding and fully sympathetic of the couples it's trying to reach.

A lot of comedy -- some say all comedy -- is rooted in pain. Certainly the best comedy, by succinctly revealing what we know but never quite expressed, touches a nerve. That's what happens in these visits with Neil and Karen, a young couple trying everything to conceive. Their love, and accompanying desire for a child, has devolved to an obsessive quest for conception: ovulation windows, mechanical sex, self-recrimination and partner blame and deep resentment of the fertile Other.

Here's some dialogue from the best of the video spots, shot as documentary interviews intercut with live action.

Neil: (To his wife) Oh, and Jane's pregnant again.

Karen: (After a stunned pause) Whatever.

Perhaps here we should mention that Neil and Karen are an ordinary looking couple in every way, except she has a bluebird costume on and he is dressed like a bumblebee. It's meant to give an absurdist slant to a very serious matter, in turn permitting the reduction of human anguish into a series of laugh lines. And by "reduce" we do not mean diminish. We mean purify. Halfway into the first spot, their condition is so real, and they are so hilariously its victims, you cease to notice the goofy outfits. They are just the unhappy, overwrought Karen and Neil.

The message: Get to a specialist. For reasons either wonderful or disgusting, EMD Serono's confident it is well positioned from there.