

How a mother's ultimate gift of love is helping her daughter be a mum

Robyn Riley, Exclusive

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Lisa Sharp and daughter Cassidy do pretty much everything together. They live near each other, work together, lunch most days, and soon they will share a unique birth experience.

Mrs Sharp is carrying the biological baby of Ms Sharp and her fiance Corey Macartney; a precious baby they can't wait to meet very soon.

At 55 the surrogate gran says this pregnancy has been easier than her previous three with her own children.

"I'm a little tired now that we are nearing the end, but I feel great, I have been very well," she said.

Being a surrogate for her second grandchild is a special gift that has been almost a decade in the making.

"I was born without a uterus," Ms Sharp, 27, said.

"I was 18 when I found out I couldn't have children. After the shock of it all, Mum and I looked into what my options would be down the track."

They discussed adoption, a uterus transplant and surrogacy. Over lunchbreaks and coffee, each option was carefully considered, the risks and benefits weighed.

Mrs Sharp was happy to donate her uterus for transplant, but her daughter said it was still early days and if it failed it would also take out the surrogacy option. That idea was shelved.

This is a first: Obstetrician Dr Stephen Cole with from left: dad-to-be Corey Macartney, mum-to-be Cassidy Sharp and surrogate grandmother Lisa Sharp. Picture: David Caird

Then when Ms Sharp became engaged to Mr Macartney, 26, her mother said they had better “giddy up” with family plans if she was to be a surrogate as she didn’t want to be pregnant at 60.

That brought the close family on a journey that started three years ago and ended with specialist obstetrician Stephen Cole, who has delivered well over 8000 babies.

A surrogate family talks about their joy at their unique and special arrival.

Dr Cole says while he manages about two surrogate births a year, this is the first time he has cared for a mother acting as a surrogate for her daughter and future son-in-law.

“It is certainly unique,” Dr Cole said. “I do a lot of pre-pregnancy consultations for women over 50, making sure they’re healthy enough (for IVF) and not putting their own health at undue risk.

“It’s even more important in surrogacy that we are conscious of the risks to the surrogate as well as to the pregnancy.”



Not long to go now. Lisa Sharp (centre) is carrying her grandchild for daughter Cassidy Sharp and future son-in-law Corey Macartney. Picture: David Caird

Dr Cole is caring for the family at Epworth Freemasons in East Melbourne, which has a surrogacy support service.

For the family this means a six-hour round trip for prenatal visits and soon a temporary move to Melbourne to be close by for the eagerly awaited arrival.

To get to this point the family has also had counselling and assessments, fulfilled a list of other legal requirements and been before an independent patient review panel to qualify for surrogacy.

In Victoria surrogacy is only allowed altruistically (no commercial payment) and when the baby is born despite being from Ms Sharp's egg and Mr Macartney's sperm, by law the birth mother (Mrs Sharp) and her husband (Darren Sharp) will be registered as parents on the birth certificate.

The biological parents must apply to amend the birth certificate, another step that can take a year or more.



Cassidy Sharp says she is nervous but excited to meet her baby, which is being carried for her by her



mother, Lisa Sharp. Picture: David Caird

An ultrasound image of Cassidy and Corey’s unborn baby that will be delivered soon by specialist obstetrician Dr Stephen Cole. Picture: David Caird

Legal clerk Ms Sharp says she has no problems with her parents being temporarily listed on the birth certificate.

“To us it is just another hoop to jump through,” she said. “It’s no different than jumping through the hoops of the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the legal agreements we had to go through and sign, and facing the patient review panel. It’s just another hoop.”

Her mother agrees: “If it’s a hoop that protects everybody concerned, well, fair enough. We come from a law office. If it is a law, there’s a reason for it.”

Mrs Sharp's health was also a key consideration before pregnancy, but she passed with flying colours thanks in part to regular walks with the family's two pet dogs.

"Lisa's obviously fit and healthy, and she was exercising regularly, so she had good cardiovascular fitness," Dr Cole said. "They're the sorts of things that go into my assessment of her health. And then we have a discussion, and I have this discussion with anyone who's considering surrogacy, about how it is one thing to accept risks on your own behalf, but when you're a surrogate and you're taking on risks on someone else's behalf, then those risks take on a greater significance."



Final countdown: Dr Stephen Cole checking on the baby's progress. He says surrogate Lisa Sharp is fit and healthy. Daughter Cassidy Sharp is eager to meet her first baby. Picture: David Caird

As Mrs Sharp had been through menopause she also needed daily hormone injections for several weeks to prepare her uterus to support the precious pregnancy.

Now it is a waiting game for the birth of the baby, a second grandchild for Mrs Sharp and husband Darren.

For Mr Macartney it will be the first grandchild for his family, who he said were all “stoked” and very invested in the process.

“We are all excited and a little nervous,” Ms Sharp said. “I’m nervous about watching my mum in pain and going through labour.”

She will be at her mother’s side for the delivery and stay in hospital after the birth to get acquainted with her baby.

Mrs Sharp said afterwards she would be on hand, “just like any grandmother” to support the young couple in their journey of parenthood.

They did create three embryos via IVF and achieved this pregnancy on their first IVF cycle, which means two embryos remain frozen.

Will Mrs Sharp be a surrogate again?

“We’ll never say never,” she said. “(But) we’ll just wait until we get this one out and see how it goes.”