

## Artificial insemination's rocky ethical start

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The first physician to take a systematic approach to human artificial insemination was the controversial 19th-century surgeon J. Marion Sims. Although he founded the Women's Hospital in New York, the first establishment devoted solely to women's health, he's also known for more troubling activities: Many of his notable medical contributions were a result of research he conducted on slaves without his subjects' consent.

The Women's Hospital opened in 1855, and during its first several years in operation, Sims performed 55 artificial-insemination procedures on six different women; only one resulted in a pregnancy, and it ended in a miscarriage.

His techniques likely would have been effective if Sims had taken his patients' ovulation cycles into account—but because he didn't, the first artificial insemination to result in a live birth, performed by the Philadelphia physician William Pancoast, didn't happen until a few decades after Sims' attempts. In 1884, one of Pancoast's patients, a 31-year-old woman, came to see him at Sansom Street Hospital about her inability to conceive.

Pancoast initially assumed that the problem was with the woman's fertility, but numerous exams led him to ultimately conclude that the issue was actually her husband's low sperm count. When the husband, a 41-year-old wealthy merchant from Philadelphia, came in for an examination of his own, Pancoast deemed him "of sound body," with the exception of a case of gonorrhea from years earlier.

**Read full, original post:** [The First Artificial Insemination Was an Ethical Nightmare](#)