



PRESS RELEASE

Source: Fertility Fairness

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NHS IVF slashed across Cheshire

West, East and South Cheshire and Vale Royal clinical commissioning groups are cutting the number of NHS-funded IVF cycles from 3 to 1, with some clinical exceptions, and introducing stricter eligibility criteria for access, with effect from 28 April.

Susan Seenan, co-chair of campaign group Fertility Fairness said: "This is terrible news for patients and for NHS fertility services in England. These 4 Cheshire CCGs were among the best in the country: they were among the minority of England's CCGs that offered 3 full cycles of IVF as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Six weeks ago, Scotland introduced the gold standard of fertility care: 3 full cycles of IVF for all eligible women under 40; it is a national disgrace that now just 13 per cent of England's CCGs offer 3 full NHS-funded IVF cycles.'

Sarah Norcross, co-chair of Fertility Fairness, said: 'We urge the UK Government and NHS England to stop this trend of disinvestment in NHS fertility services, and to commit to improving access to fertility treatment for people in England. Fertility Fairness urges the rest of the UK to follow the Scottish Government's lead, and to take immediate action to stop the rationing of fertility treatment.

Fertility Fairness' updated 2016 audit of England's 209 CCGs shows a marked reduction in access to NHS-funded IVF, with potential further cuts ahead. Five CCGs have decommissioned NHS IVF and provide 0 cycles (2.4 per cent); 61.2 per cent offer just 1 NHS IVF cycle; 23.4 per cent provide 2 NHS IVF cycles and just 12.9 per cent follow national guidance and offer 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles. Approaching one in ten CCGs (7 per cent) are currently consulting on reducing or decommissioning NHS fertility treatment.

The Cheshire CCG states eligible women aged 23-39 will receive 2 IVF 'treatments'. This means that initially women will be offered 6 cycles of intrauterine insemination (IUI) and, if this is not successful, they will be offered 1 IVF cycle (which includes the transfer of all fresh and subsequent frozen embryos); women who are not clinically eligible for IUI will be offered 2 IVF cycles.

Further restrictions include:

additional restrictions around BMI and smoking status for male partners (the restrictions currently apply only to female partner);

the eligibility threshold for IVF for period of trying to conceive to be increased from 2 years to 3 years for unexplained infertility (age to be taken into account);

stopping routine funding of surgical sperm recovery, individual funding request for patients with genetic conditions;

stopping routine funding of donor oocyte cycle;

stopping routine funding of sperm insemination unless part of an IVF cycle.

ENDS

Notes for editors

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Fertility Network UK media volunteers are available on request. Details of the audit are available at www.fertilityfairness.co.uk

1. NICE guidance recommends three cycles of IVF for women under 40 years and one cycle for some women aged 40-42.

Scotland offer the gold standard of fertility treatment: three full IVF cycles for women under 40, including access for couples with children from previous relationships; in Wales, women under 40 are entitled to two cycles and in Northern Ireland women under 40 are offered one cycle.

2. There is a move towards sustained disinvestment in NHS fertility services in England.

Five CCGs do not offer any NHS fertility treatment: Croydon, Mid-Essex, North East Essex, South Norfolk and Basildon and Brentwood.

The following CCGs are considering cutting the number of NHS-funded IVF cycles they offer: Richmond, St Helens, Cambridge and Peterborough, all of Lancashire's eight CCGs (Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre, Lancashire North, Chorley and South Ribble, Greater Preston, Blackburn with Darwen; East Lancashire, West Lancashire and all three Worcestershire CCGs: South Worcestershire, Redditch and Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest.

3. England's CCGs unfairly ration NHS fertility services in a number of ways. Only ten per cent of England's CCGs enable access to couples with children from a previous relationship; nine per cent of CCGs deny treatment to women over the age of 35 in contravention of national guidelines; 16 per cent of CCGs stipulate couples should have been trying to conceive for three years before treatment can be offered (and if a woman suffers a miscarriage during this period, the 'waiting time' clock is set back to zero months. Just 108 out of 209 CCGs provide NHS IVF to women aged 40-42 (51.7%).

4. Fertility Fairness is a multidisciplinary umbrella organisation representing the major patient and professional bodies working in the field of fertility. Fertility Fairness campaigns for fair and equitable access to NHS-funded fertility services in accordance with national

recommendations issued by NICE. This includes the right of eligible couples to receive up to three full cycles of IVF treatment regardless of where they happen to live.