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Gold standard: Scotland the first country to provide 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles for all eligible couples

Fertility Network UK wholeheartedly welcomes the announcement from the Scottish Government that the number of available NHS-funded IVF cycles will be increased from two to three from 1 April 2017, for all new referrals who meet the eligibility criteria - creating the gold standard for national fertility services.

Gwenda Burns, branch coordinator Fertility Network Scotland said: 'This is wonderful news for both patients and campaigners: for the one in six couples in Scotland who face the devastation and heartbreak of fertility struggles it is a fantastic beacon of hope; for Fertility Network UK it is the news we have been working towards with the National Infertility Group, since the latter's inception in 2010.'

'Scotland has set the gold standard for national fertility services: not only has the Scottish Government recognised the far-reaching impact of fertility problems and accepted all the recommendations of Scotland's National Infertility Group, it has also become the first country in the UK to follow national fertility recommendations fully.'

Susan Seenan, chief executive of leading patient fertility charity Fertility Network UK said: 'Scotland stands head and shoulders above the rest of the UK in creating an equitable fertility service for patients: as well as eligible couples having access to 3 full NHS IVF cycles from 1 April 2017, couples where one partner has no biological child have, since September 2016, been able to access NHS fertility services.'

'The Scottish government is to be applauded in recognising the clinical and cost-effectiveness of providing a fair for all NHS fertility service based on national clinical recommendations, yet in England the opposite is happening: 98 per cent of England's clinical commissioning groups ration NHS IVF using unfair, arbitrary and non-medical criteria, such as postcode and whether one partner has a child from a previous relationship.'

'That is why, on Saturday 25 March, fertility patients affected by unfair rationing of NHS fertility services will be taking action to promote fairness for fertility treatment - contacting their MP, creating a fertility funding Thunderclap and tweeting their support #therighttotry #IVFx3 #tellyourMP

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Notes to editors:

1. From 1 April 2017, eligible couples (women under 40) will be able to access up to three NHS-funded IVF cycles where it will be clinically effective. New criteria were implemented in September 2016 to allow couples to access treatment where 'one partner has no biological child'.

2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance recommends three cycles of IVF for women under 40 years and one cycle for some women aged 40-42. In Wales, women under 40 are entitled to two cycles and in Northern Ireland women under 40 are offered one partial cycle. 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 (2.4 per cent); 60 per cent offer just 1 NHS IVF cycle; 23.4 per cent provide 2 NHS IVF cycles and just 14.8 per cent follow national guidance and offer 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles. Approaching one in ten CCGs (8.6 per cent) are currently consulting on reducing or decommissioning NHS fertility treatment.

3. The 3 things people can do to promote fairness for fertility treatment are:

1. tell your MP: inform them of your situation and what is happening in your area; a template letter is on our website at <http://fertilitynetworkuk.org/action/> and MP's contacts details are available at <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>
2. tweet your support and a pic using the hashtags #IVFx3 #tellyourMP #therighttotry
3. help create a fertility funding Thunderclap - a social media message sent collectively - on Facebook, Twitter and tumblr on Saturday 25 March at 3pm. Register your support for the Thunderclap at <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/52716-the-right-to-try-campaign>

4. 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 women suffers a miscarriage during this period, the 'waiting time' clock is set back to zero months).

5. Fertility Network UK provides practical and emotional support, authoritative information and advice for anyone experiencing fertility issues. The charity works to raise the profile and understanding of fertility issues and to push for timely and equitable provision of fertility treatment throughout the UK.

6. Fertility Network UK provides a free and impartial Support Line 0121 323 5025

7. Fertility Network UK supports people. We rely on voluntary donations to continue our vital work. You can donate now by visiting www.justgiving.com/infertilitynetwork