



## PRESS RELEASE

**Source: Fertility Fairness**  
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### **Southend slashes NHS IVF; Essex the UK's IVF black spot**

Sarah Norcross, co-chair of Fertility Fairness said: 'Fertility Fairness is appalled that Southend health bosses have cut the number of NHS-funded IVF cycles available to patients in the area from two to just one partial cycle, and removed access for women aged between 40-42 when the national recommendation is for three full IVF cycles for women under 40 and one full cycle for women aged between 40-42. Access to fertility treatment should be dependent on your medical need - and not your postcode and pay packet. Fertility patients in Essex are the worst off in the country: West Essex cut to 1 NHS IVF cycle at the end of last year, Mid-Essex, North East Essex and Basildon & Brentwood have removed all NHS IVF, and now Southend is slashing provision too. Essex is the UK's IVF black spot.'

Aileen Feeney, co-chair of Fertility Fairness and chief executive of leading patient charity Fertility Network said: 'We are extremely concerned about the effect that reducing access to NHS IVF will have on already distressed patients. Infertility is a devastating disease which can cause depression, suicidal feelings, relationship breakdown and social isolation; removing the recommended medical help is cruel and economically short-sighted. Not treating fertility problems properly costs the NHS a lot of money: through an increase in life-long mental health problems, and by increasing the likelihood that more patients will travel abroad for reduced cost fertility treatment - a move that is highly likely to drive up the number of multiple births which are of high risk to mother and babies and incur additional long-term medical costs. These costs could be saved if national guidelines were followed.'

ENDS

#### **Notes for editors**

Contact: Catherine Hill media relations officer Fertility Fairness and Fertility Network UK on 07469-660845 [media@fertilitynetworkuk.org](mailto:media@fertilitynetworkuk.org)

Fertility Network UK media volunteers are available on request.

1. National Institute of health and care excellence (NICE) guidance recommends three full cycles of IVF for women under 40 years and one full cycle for women aged 40-42. According to NICE, a full cycle of IVF treatment should include one round of ovarian stimulation, followed by the transfer of any resultant fresh and frozen embryos. Southend clinical commissioning group (CCG) will now only provide one partial cycle - one round of ovarian stimulation and the transfer of a maximum of two embryos.

In Scotland, women under 40, including couples with children from previous relationships, can access three IVF cycles; 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. Fertility Fairness' updated 2017 audit of England's 208 CCGs shows a marked reduction in access to NHS-funded IVF, with potential further cuts ahead. The vast majority of England's CCGs - 88 per cent - do not follow national guidance and do not offer 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles. Seven CCGs have decommissioned NHS IVF or suspended and provide 0 cycles ( 3.4 per cent); 62 per cent offer just 1 NHS IVF cycle; 24 per cent provide 2 NHS IVF cycles and just 12 per cent follow national guidance and offer 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles. Approaching one in ten CCGs is currently consulting on reducing or decommissioning NHS fertility treatment.

3. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Scientific Impact Paper, *Multiple Pregnancies following Assisted Conception*, noted that Government funding of IVF is the most important factor that could maintain low rates of multiple pregnancies following treatment and reduce associated complications for mothers and babies, as well as costs to the NHS. It estimated the neonatal cost to the NHS for twins to be 16 times higher than that for a singleton baby, and noted the effect of fertility tourism on the risk of multiple births following IVF. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1471-0528.14974/full>

4. Key findings of The Impact of Fertility Problems 2016 from Fertility Network UK with Middlesex University London<sup>[1]</sup> highlighted: 90 per cent of respondents reported feeling depressed; 42% suicidal; nearly 50% of respondents reported on average feeling sad, out of control, frustrated, helpless, fearful and worried nearly all of the time. For further information, see <http://fertilitynetworkuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/SURVEY-RESULTS-Impact-of-Fertility-Problems.pdf>

5. 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.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <http://fertilitynetworkuk.org/survey-on-the-impact-of-fertility-problems/>