



## PRESS RELEASE

**Source: Fertility Fairness**

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### **Deferring NHS IVF in Northern Ireland distressing for patients and economically short-sighted**

Plans to defer NHS fertility treatment for at least five months for all new patients in Northern Ireland are distressing for patients and economically short-sighted, says campaign group Fertility Fairness. The proposal to defer NHS IVF access to Northern Ireland's Regional Fertility Centre until 1st April 2018 involves all patients across all Northern Ireland's five health boards and will, if the proposal goes ahead, commence in October 2017.

Susan Seenan, co-chair of Fertility Fairness said: "Fertility Fairness is appalled at the proposal to defer NHS fertility treatment for five months for all new patients in Northern Ireland: this will cause unnecessary suffering for already stressed patients and is an economically short-sighted measure. Struggling with the disease of infertility can lead to significant mental health problems including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts; patients are more likely to present to their GPs, often struggle to hold down jobs, and face an increased rate of marriage breakdown. Deferring funding will also increase the risk that more patients will travel abroad for reduced cost fertility treatment which is highly likely to drive up the number of multiple births which are of high risk to mother and babies and incur additional medical costs. There is therefore significant value in continuing to fund fertility treatment without the proposed five-month deferral.'

Sharon Davidson, Northern Ireland Coordinator for leading patient charity Fertility Network UK added: 'Fertility Network UK is extremely concerned about the effect this will have on patients. We are dealing with calls from distressed patients who have put their lives on hold desperately waiting for their one chance to try for a baby. Couples with fertility problems are already waiting unnecessarily long times: there is currently a lengthy 18-month wait from GP referral to starting IVF or ICSI, and prior to this patients can have been struggling to conceive for three years before they qualify for NHS fertility treatment. Prompt access to NHS fertility services is crucial for patients to have the best possible chance of success; that's why we urge everyone affected by these proposed cuts to complete the public consultation document at <http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/about/Consultations.htm> and to highlight the significant impact these proposed cuts will have on couples potentially dealing with depression,

relationship problems, needing time off work and getting into debt to pay for financially-crippling treatment.

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### Notes for editors

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Fertility Network UK media volunteers are available on request.

1. NICE guidance recommends three cycles of IVF for women under 40 years and one cycle for some women aged 40-42. According to NICE, a full cycle of IVF treatment should include 1 round of ovarian stimulation, followed by the transfer of any resultant fresh and frozen embryos. In Northern Ireland patients who meet set clinical criteria only receive one cycle of IVF/ICSI treatment and one cycle of frozen embryo treatment.\_

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. In E

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

3. 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>

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.

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