

## Faye's story

My story begins with a simple missed period in September 2013. I'd been on the contraceptive pill for a lot of my adult life so wasn't too worried. They often came late and only hung around for a few days. Nevertheless, I went to see the doctor. 'Come back after you have missed six in a row,' I was told. I walked out of his office and on the way home decided that I would go back if I missed the next one. To miss six in a row I thought ridiculous. Sure enough my next period was a no show. Back to the doctors I went, requesting a different GP to my last visit.

For the next year I had blood tests, which apparently were all normal. We changed my pill several times, the mini pill facilitated a bleed in June 2014. I thought we'd sorted it. Great. Then back to nothing the next month...

This is when I demanded to be referred to a specialist. Looking back I should have been referred much earlier. I should have pushed or, in my opinion, my GP should have realised they didn't know enough and sent me to someone who did.

I saw the specialist a year after my first missed period. I went to see a gynaecologist. I assumed I would walk in and have a chat about how to proceed. I was wrong. Within the course of that initial meeting we discovered I was unlikely to have children. Dagger, meet my heart.

The ultrasound showed less than a third of the eggs a woman my age should have. She explained that I wasn't producing enough oestrogen naturally so needed to go back on the combined pill immediately to make up for this. She also wrote to my GP requesting they organise a bone scan. I was sent to have yet another blood test. This time looking for specific hormones related to fertility. The next few days waiting were awful. I wasn't optimistic, but I had hope that there would be something that could be done. At least my bone scan results were acceptable.

I went back in to see her a month later. She told me I had a very low fertility level. My hormones were that of a lady looking at menopause. Fabulous. Now what?

Someone very close to me had had recent success at an IVF clinic in Spain. I thought that there might be something they could do. I spoke with one of the founders of the clinic, who was the gentleman recommended. I'd emailed him all my results. During the phone call he said that he was so sorry but I would have less than a 5% chance of IVF working, over three cycles. I was devastated. My one last hope vanished.

He did still ask me to go, as he thought they would be able to find out why this had happened. More blood tests and an MRI. I agreed to go. I knew answers would help me come to terms with this. So in the December I went off to Spain with the knowledge that I wouldn't be able to get pregnant, but to get answers about why my body was in this state.

Unfortunately the doctor I had spoken to wasn't there. I know I was in a clinic where they make miracle babies, but that's not why I was there. I knew it wasn't possible for me. So after a look, where my left ovary decided to play hide and seek, we sat down to discuss options. I asked about the MRI I was told I would have. They looked at me blankly. I then explained I'd come there for answers. They said it was too late to organise that. I'd travelled all that way to have this MRI and blood test to explain my infertility and no one knew that?!?

They thought I was there to get pregnant. What did they think they knew that their boss didn't? They said 'we can get you pregnant.' That's when I remembered I was in a private clinic. A business.

After some time someone managed to get an appointment at the hospital for me. They forced me to pay for some fertility drugs, even though I explained I was taking nothing until I knew there was nothing growing in my head! I was told the day would cost 200 Euros. I was charged 1500. They also tried to get me to sign to agree to the drugs/surgeries, etc which would mean I was locked into a contract to pay them for three cycles. I didn't sign.

When I finally got to the hospital, no one spoke any English. Not their fault but I don't know any Spanish. It wasn't a nice experience. It's scary when you can't communicate and you're alone and emotional. A few days later I heard from the original doctor I spoke to on the phone. He explained I had a 'spot' in my pituitary gland in my brain. Joy. In the January I decided to see a pituitary specialist to better understand what was in my head and what affect it was having.

After an MRI near home and some more blood tests (I was getting good at being a pin cushion), he said my 'spot' was a prolactinoma. It affects my hormone levels because of where is positioned. They fluctuate quite a lot. Something I have now got used to. I revisited my gynaecologist. I briefly explained what happened in Spain and she said that if I pursued IVF that I would be disappointed. Therefore making us feel much better about our decision not to move forward with it. For us trying and failing IVF would destroy me.

It has been a hard road, but I am now in a much better place. I have accepted that a life without children isn't necessarily a worse life. Just different to the one I always imagined.