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Fertility Network warns Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent's proposed interim fertility policy is the worst in UK

The proposed interim fertility policy from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent integrated care board (ICB) is the worst in the UK offering the least possible amount of NHS-funded IVF for women 23-40 – just one embryo transfer – warns national fertility charity Fertility Network UK.

Under a new interim policy, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB is proposing women aged 23-40 can only access one partial IVF cycle which will consist of just one embryo transfer, and women aged 40-42 are barred from NHS-funded fertility treatment. National guidance from the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) states women under 40 should be able to access three full IVF cycles (a full cycle is the transfer of a fresh embryo and all viable frozen embryos). Women aged 40-42 should be able to access one full IVF cycle.

Catherine Hill, spokesperson for Fertility Network UK said: 'This is a shockingly poor fertility policy from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB; it's so bad it's the worst in the UK. We are deeply concerned for how it will impact already distressed fertility patients and we urge the public to have their say on how this will affect them. You can do this either by completing the survey before 22 March 2023 at <https://staffsstoke.icb.nhs.uk/get-involved/assisted-conception/> or by joining online sessions on Wednesday 15 March and Monday 20 March, details at the same link.'

Ms Hill added: 'NICE recommends three full IVF cycles because that has been shown to be the most clinically-effective and the most cost-effective treatment for the disease of infertility. It is appalling that fertility patients in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will only be offered the bare minimum – just one embryo transfer. This approach raises some

troubling questions. Typically, more than one embryo is created during an IVF cycle. What will happen to these other embryos if fertility patients cannot afford to pay privately for their transfer or to freeze and store them? Will they be discarded? Is it ethical for NHS treatment to create embryos which couples may not be able to use? Fertility patients should be able to access the recommended three full IVF cycles where a fresh embryo and subsequent frozen embryos are transferred, if needed.'

The suggested interim policy from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB covers the following areas: Stoke-on-Trent – where fertility patients can currently access two partial IVF cycles (one fresh embryo transfer and one frozen embryo transfer); North Staffs; Stafford and Surrounds; Cannock Chase; East Staffs and South East Staffs & Seisdon Peninsula.

As well as offering the least possible amount of treatment for women aged 23-40, the proposed interim policy:

Excludes women aged 40-42;

Excludes single women – the policy states it is only for individuals 'in a stable relationship'; States female same-sex couples have to pay for six IUI cycles within 12 months and, if they go on to access NHS-funded IVF, they then have to pay for donor sperm;

Excludes male same-sex couples; and,

Proposes women over 35 will have to have an AMH test >3 before they can access NHS-funded fertility treatment.

ENDS

Notes to editors

For interviews and case studies contact Catherine Hill, Fertility Network UK's communications manager, on 07469-660845 media@fertilitynetworkuk.org

1. 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.
www.fertilitynetworkuk.org
2. Fertility Network UK provides a free and impartial Support Line open from 10am to 4pm. Mon, Wed and Fri: 0121 323 5025, support@fertilitynetworkuk.org Tues and Thurs: 07816 086694, janet@fertilitynetworkuk.org
3. Fertility Network UK supports people. We rely on voluntary donations to continue our vital work. You can donate now via text; text FNUK plus the donation amount to 70085. Or you can donate by visiting www.justgiving.com/fertilitynetwork