

AFFINITY



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Welcome Back to Affinity Magazine

By Sharon Martin, CEO, Fertility Network UK

We are thrilled to be relaunching Affinity Magazine, the voice of Fertility Network UK's community, a place for support, reflection, information and shared experience. After a pause, the call for its return has been loud and clear. You told us how much this publication means to you, and we listened.

Affinity has always been more than a magazine. It's a connection point between people who understand, between stories that matter and between lived experience and the change we want to see in the world. Whether you are trying to conceive, adjusting to life after treatment, navigating donor conception or surrogacy or living without children not by choice, Affinity is your space.

At Fertility Network UK, we know that fertility issues don't sit neatly in a box marked 'private'. They reach into every part of life including relationships, health, work, identity and wellbeing. Yet, despite one in six people in the UK facing fertility challenges, stigma and silence still linger. That's why Affinity matters; It helps break that silence with honesty, insight and compassion.

We've relaunched this magazine because we've seen the demand not only for practical information but for something deeper - a sense of community. In a world that can often feel isolating when you're facing fertility struggles, connection is everything. Through shared stories, expert advice, personal reflections and updates from across the UK, we hope Affinity will offer comfort, clarity, and solidarity.

The theme running through this issue is belonging. What does it mean to belong when you're living with uncertainty, loss, or outcomes you didn't plan for? How do we create inclusive, supportive environments not just in clinics or support groups, but in our workplaces, friendships, and families?

This issue also recognises the many paths people take: those in treatment, those who've stopped, those who are exploring donor conception or adoption and those who are childless not by choice. Every story deserves to be heard; every experience has value.

We want to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who makes our work possible - our fundraisers, who run, cycle, bake and give in so many ways, and our corporate partners, whose support helps extend our reach and deepen our impact.

If you're reading this and would like to help us do more as a corporate partner, a fundraiser or a business ready to make a difference, we'd love to hear from you. Your support enables us to keep offering resources like Affinity, our helpline, events and vital advocacy.

As we relaunch Affinity, we do so with renewed purpose. This magazine is here because of you and for you. We want to hear your voices, amplify your concerns and celebrate your resilience.

Please read, share and let us know what you'd like to see in future issues. Affinity is your magazine; let's continue to make it something we build together.

With gratitude,
Sharon Martin
CEO, Fertility Network UK



Grace and Alastair MacDonald: IVF Pioneers Become First Patrons of Fertility Network UK



Grace speaking at the FNUK 20th Birthday.
Photo by Michèle Wright

Grace MacDonald made history in 1979 as the mother of Alastair MacDonald, the world's first male baby born through in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Now, more than four decades later, both Grace and Alastair are continuing their extraordinary legacy by becoming the first patrons of Fertility Network UK, the leading charity supporting people facing fertility challenges across the UK.

Their story began at Oldham General Hospital with Alastair being born in Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow just six months after Louise Brown, the world's first IVF baby. Alastair's birth was a critical moment in the early development of IVF, proving that the process could lead to repeated, healthy pregnancies. It was a monumental step forward in reproductive medicine and one made possible by Grace's remarkable courage in undertaking a then experimental treatment.

IVF has since enabled millions of people to become parents, but in the late 1970s, it was new, controversial, and unproven. Grace's successful pregnancy helped confirm the ground-breaking work of Professor Robert Edwards and Dr. Patrick Steptoe. But it also helped shine a light, then and now, on the contributions of a third key figure: Jean Purdy, a nurse and embryologist whose vital role in the success of IVF was long overlooked.

IVF gave me the chance to become a mother and now it's a privilege to give something back as a patron"



Pictured: Alastair speaking at the FNUK 20th Birthday.
Photo by Michèle Wright



Pictured: Alastair and Grace MacDonald with FNUK CEO Sharon Martin. Photo by Michèle Wright

In recent years, Grace has been involved in elevating Jean Purdy's legacy, including working closely with the creators of *Joy*, the 2024 Netflix film that tells the true story behind the birth of IVF. Grace collaborated during the creative development process to ensure historical accuracy and to support the film's efforts to give Purdy her rightful recognition. *Joy* has since been widely praised for highlighting the humanity, perseverance and team effort behind one of medicine's most extraordinary breakthroughs.

Now, Grace and Alastair are stepping forward as patrons of Fertility Network UK, bringing their story full circle by using their platform to support and advocate for others going through fertility struggles today.

"It's been an incredible journey," Grace said. "IVF gave me the chance to become a mother and now it's a privilege to give something back as a patron. I want people to know they're not alone."

"Grace and Alastair's story is one of bravery, belief and breakthrough,"

For Alastair, the role carries deep personal meaning. "I've always known I was part of something historic but becoming a patron is about looking forward—about helping others find hope, just as my mum did."

Fertility Network UK has welcomed the MacDonalds' patronage with great enthusiasm. "Grace and Alastair's story is one of bravery, belief and breakthrough," said the charity. "Their continued involvement is an inspiration to everyone affected by fertility issues."

"I've always known I was part of something historic but becoming a patron is about looking forward"

From a ground-breaking birth in 1979 to championing support and recognition today, Grace and Alastair MacDonald's legacy is one of resilience, compassion and hope for generations to come.

Pictured: Netflix's *JOY*. Grace worked in collaboration with Netflix on the film *JOY*



22 years of taking fertility forward



By Jessica Hepburn
Author, Arts Producer and
Adventure Activist
www.jessicahepburn.com

Over a decade ago my life changed when I ‘came out’ publicly for the first time about my infertility. But, actually, it changed 10 years before that when my partner and I first threw away the contraception and started trying to conceive. It therefore feels like serendipity that I’ve been asked to write this article not long after Fertility Network UK’s 20th anniversary celebrations; our history dovetailing each other’s.

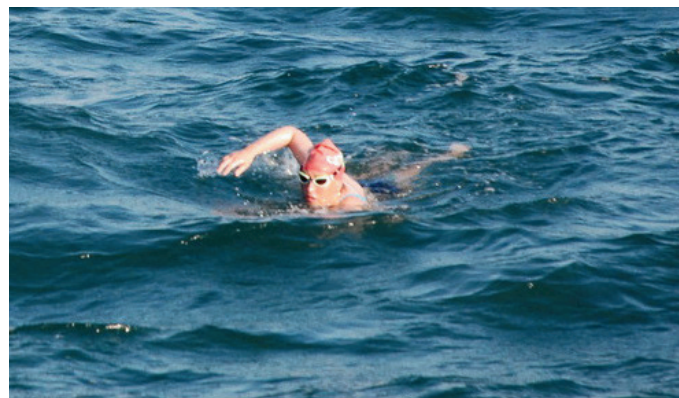
At 34 years old, I felt ready to start a family, but nature had other plans. After a year of trying, nothing had happened. We made our first foray to a fertility clinic. It marked the beginning of a decade long struggle to conceive – multiple miscarriages, an ectopic pregnancy and a total of 11 rounds of unsuccessful IVF.

For a long time, I told no one about what I was going through – hoping that next month the nightmare would be over and I’d be able to join the ‘mummy club’ too. I felt so ashamed that my body couldn’t do what every other woman seemed to find so easy. I felt terrified that I might never be happy if I couldn’t have my own child.

I started writing: on the tube back and forth to work. And in February 2014 - my memoir - *The Pursuit of Motherhood* – was published. It was a big decision to bring out the book in my own name. I was worried about the world knowing the depths of my desperation and despair. I was going to call myself by the pseudonym ‘Jessica Harper’ – Harper being my grandmother’s maiden name, but then my editor did a Google search and discovered there was a Jessica Harper who had defrauded Lloyds Bank of a million pounds. It wasn’t worth the mix up. Besides, I also knew there were things I wanted to see changed in the field of fertility, and anonymity would hamper my activism.

I wanted to campaign for better understanding about the psychological impact of fertility problems - the need to treat both the body AND the mind. Also, to raise awareness about the need for better fertility education, particularly among young people, to ensure they have the best chance to create their future families.

My book catapulted me into the limelight as one of the first people to speak openly about the stigma of infertility and the fact that IVF isn’t always a magic bullet. It changed everything; I became a ‘public infertile’ who was widely featured in the press and media.



Pictured: Jessica swimming the Channel

'A must read for anyone facing fertility issues' **KATE BRIAN**,
Author of The Complete Guide to IVF



The Pursuit of Motherhood

JESSICA HEPBURN

'Just delicious...it made me feel better in a world that can make you feel pretty rubbish.'
LISA FAULKNER




21 Miles

Swimming in search of the meaning of motherhood

JESSICA HEPBURN

'If you have ever found yourself in a rut ... this book is for you.'
EMMA GANNON



Save Me From The Waves

How adventure changed my life

JESSICA HEPBURN

I founded Fertility Fest - an arts festival about the science of making (and not making) babies. I am now the author of a trilogy of books exploring the emotional and physical journey of fertility and infertility. I also became a patient adviser to the HFEA and a trustee of Fertility Network UK.

After my long and difficult fertility journey, I set myself some of the toughest physical challenges I could think of - I ran the London Marathon, swam the English Channel and climbed Mount Everest. These weren't just personal goals; I did them to raise awareness and funds for Fertility Network UK, a charity that means a great deal to me and to so many others navigating infertility. The experiences pushed me to my limits, both physically and emotionally, and they became the inspiration for my books, where I've tried to capture what it means to face loss, find strength, and redefine what a fulfilled life can look like.

Now, more than twenty years on, it still feels like an important moment to reflect on how far we've come in raising awareness about fertility and, just as importantly, to highlight the work that remains to be done.

When people say to me today that 'infertility' and 'miscarriage' are taboo subjects - I disagree. I think the amount of press coverage, social media sharing and creative story-telling has grown exponentially. The positive result being that people on a fertility journey feel less alone. I also think that alongside this, fertility clinics have become far more aware of the impact of treatment on their patients' mental health.

Although I do still hear some people saying they don't get the empathy and support they need, I also think knowledge about our bodies and reproductive science has improved dramatically. Conditions like PCOS and Endometriosis and their effect on fertility are now understood more widely. The opportunities that technology has offered for making modern families, from two dads to solo mums, doesn't seem unusual, in fact it's wonderfully commonplace. And what for so long was seen as a health condition all about women, has now become much more inclusive of men too. Whenever I chair a talk about sperm at the annual Fertility Show, it's one of the most attended sessions. And many more men are speaking out about their fertility journeys because - fact - men have feelings too!

All these things highlight the important shifts that have taken place over the last twenty years. But, there's still more work to do. Infertility is not decreasing - in fact, probably the reverse. Reproductive science is advancing - but it's still no guarantee to a baby. People need vital help navigating the important personal and ethical decisions around their parenting choices, particularly in a world where a lot of people either can't or don't want to start their families at the biologically optimal age which directly leads to fertility problems; but also because over population is a major factor in the climate emergency and that's an issue too. There are still huge conundrums to confront.

At the end of the day, however, one thing will never change; family is vital to human happiness so the work we're doing collectively, as individual activists and national charities, is essential in taking fertility forward.



In Loving Memory of Diane: A Lifeline for the Fertility Community

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the passing of our much-loved colleague, Diane Arnold, who died on Friday 2nd May. For nearly 30 years, Diane was a vital presence in our Charity, leaving a lasting impact on all who had the privilege to work with her or speak with her as a fertility nurse.

For 28 years, Diane Arnold was a calm and compassionate voice in the lives of thousands of people facing the loneliness and heartbreak of infertility. As a key member of Fertility Network UK, Diane offered unwavering support, expert guidance and genuine empathy to anyone who picked up the phone in search of understanding. She will be remembered for the depth of her compassion and her dedication to others.

Diane joined the charity in 1996, when it was still known as iSSUE – The National Fertility Association. On her first day, she was ushered into a small office with nothing but a phone, and handwritten notes were slid under her door with the names and numbers of people waiting for a call. From that humble beginning, Diane helped build the support line into a lifeline. For almost three decades, she brought her expertise as a former fertility nurse and her training in counselling to every conversation, always ensuring people felt heard, validated, and less alone.

Over the years, the charity would go through several transformations, from Infertility Network UK to Fertility Network UK, but one thing never changed - Diane's commitment to the people on the other end of the line.

“From the very start of our journey the first call I made was answered by Diane. The kindness, warmth and care was always so welcomed and appreciated. Little chats in between the questions were so lovely” from comments on social media.

Whether someone was calling for the first time or the fiftieth, Diane offered the same calm presence and wealth of knowledge. “If you don’t understand something now, you will when I’m finished with you,” she used to say, and she meant it.

Diane’s support often extended beyond information. She had an instinctive understanding of the emotional toll infertility takes, especially on those navigating family expectations and social pressures. She gave people permission to protect their peace, offering practical advice grounded in compassion: “You don’t have to go to the baby shower. Send a card if you want to but take care of yourself first”.

“Diane was such a genuinely lovely person!” Supportive, caring, empathetic and everything you would want when you’re scared, upset and looking for support” from comments on social media.

She was also instrumental in encouraging more men to seek support, helping to break down taboos around male fertility with her signature warmth and reassurance.

Perhaps most powerfully, Diane built lasting connections with the people she helped. She kept a treasured photo album of letters, baby photos, and updates sent by former callers who had found hope after speaking with her. She even kept a photo of two embryos, sent by a woman whose dreams of parenthood were not realised but who still felt moved to honour Diane's support.

In 2021, Diane's life came full circle in a moment that captured just how much she meant to those she helped. Following a cataract operation, a nurse broke down in tears upon realising who she was - the same Diane who had once guided her through her fertility journey. "It feels like I'm meeting a celebrity".

"If you don't understand something now, you will when I'm done with you!"



Pictured: Diane with husband Keith

That moment, like so many in Diane's career, was a testament to the quiet, life-changing impact she had on people's lives. Her parting wish for the future of fertility care was simple and entirely in keeping with the way she lived her life: "Don't forget the patients. They're at the heart of everything. Take the time to explain, to guide them."

Diane Arnold was much more than a colleague. She was a mentor, a friend and a steadfast advocate for everyone who needed a listening ear. Her compassion, wisdom and extraordinary service will remain part of the fabric of Fertility Network UK forever.

We are deeply grateful for all she gave us. She will be dearly missed.

Diane Arnold Volunteer Excellence Award



The Diane Arnold Volunteer Excellence Award will honour a volunteer each year who reflects the same values Diane lived by. To support this lasting tribute, we've launched a JustGiving page with donations helping fund volunteer training, recognition and the award itself. The first award will be presented in May 2026.

Scan the QR code below to support this meaningful award in Diane's honour. Every donation helps celebrate our incredible volunteers.



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An interview with our former CEO

In 2005, Susan Seenan joined Fertility Network UK as Communications Officer, becoming Deputy CEO in 2017. After facing her own fertility struggles, she spent over a decade supporting others on their journeys. We spoke to Susan about her proudest achievements at the charity and why ongoing support for fertility patients remains vital.

What is your background and what led you to work at Fertility Network UK?

My husband and I started trying for a baby and, as with most people, we never thought that we would have any problem conceiving. However, we did and we embarked on a long journey of month after month of disappointment. We had the usual investigations and were told that it was unlikely that we would conceive naturally and that we would need fertility treatment. That was a devastating blow, but more devastating was the fact that although treatment was available on the NHS in Scotland, there was a long waiting list. Whilst on the list, we conceived naturally against all the odds but sadly lost our little boy at 20 weeks.

We rejoined the waiting list and were very lucky because by then the Scottish Government had invested in NHS fertility treatment and the wait wasn't terribly long. We had a cycle of IVF and although I experienced OHSS - Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome and we had to freeze our embryos, we were successful on the first frozen replacement. Still not plain sailing though – I went into labour at 25 weeks and five days later, after holding on as long as I could, our son was born at 26 weeks. Weighing just over one kilo, we still had a lot to deal with before he finally came home. After going through so much, and being fortunate enough to finally be successful, I wanted to help support others and campaign for better NHS treatment.



Pictured: Susan Seenan, Former FNUK CEO

During your time as CEO, what were the biggest challenges facing fertility patients?

There are so many challenges facing fertility patients. Some have changed and provision of counselling and support for patients is now much better although it has a long way to go before there is enough support available. But the biggest challenge was, and still is, the postcode lottery facing patients particularly across England. It should never be the case that treatment for any medical condition is dependent on your postcode, or your partner, but sadly this is still a huge issue for far too many patients today.

Were there any particular highlights or milestones during your time at FNUK?

There were several highlights, but the main one for me was the successful work which Fertility Network UK carried out with the Scottish Government to ensure that all eligible patients would receive the three recommended full cycles of IVF. This followed the successful change to extend treatment to allow couples in Scotland to access NHS fertility treatment where one partner did not have a biological child. Both these contrasted with the postcode lottery facing patients across England where access to any treatment varied according to their postcode and which we continued to campaign against.

What change would you like to see in the future for fertility patients?

I would love to see ALL eligible patients being able to access up to three full cycles of IVF across the UK. Fertility treatment was pioneered here and yet patients in England continue to struggle to access it if they live in the 'wrong' part of the country. I hope campaigning will continue on behalf of the one in six couples who struggle to have the family they so want but I hope that eventually campaigning will no longer be needed and that access to NHS treatment will be available on an equitable basis across the whole of the UK.

Why do you think Fertility Network UK is such an important charity?

Fertility Network UK is important because it provides that impartial support to people struggling to find support anywhere else. It can be hit or miss with clinics, depending on location and it's important that there's a place where people really care about the people they're supporting. The charity can also signpost you if they can't help with your specific query. That one supportive place to go is so important.

Support Services & Volunteers

We have lots going on in terms of planning for our support activities, with new wellbeing sessions and information events in the pipeline. We are also continuing to make improvements to our support groups and are updating our volunteers' training and resources.

Many of our activities depend on the commitment of our dedicated volunteers; they play a crucial role in the delivery of our services helping to run our support groups and ensuring people feel understood and less isolated through their journey.

We are extremely grateful for our wonderful volunteers and are pleased to have recently welcomed Nicole as a Walk & Talk volunteer in Scotland! With Nicole onboard it means we now have two regular Walk & Talks – our London Walk & Talk meets on the last Sunday of the month at different parks in London and Nicole rotates Walk & Talks in parks in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. Our new Fertility Treatment Overseas volunteer, Andrea, just hosted her first successful support meeting for people exploring treatment abroad and is going to help facilitate our growing monthly London Walk & Talk group too.

We have a new South Asian group volunteer, Seetal, who is hosting a monthly peer support group for this community and has already lined up some exciting guest speakers for the year ahead. We also welcomed Samar to lead our Muslim Women's Group with peer support meetings already booked in for the rest of the year.

We are always looking for more volunteers and would especially like to expand our Walk & Talk events throughout the rest of the UK. If you have personal infertility experience and would like to support people face to face and can commit to a monthly meet up on a weekend, then please do get in touch!
support@fertilitynetworkuk.org

"It helped my mental health, not feeling so alone, being able to talk with others who have a shared experience"



Pictured: Nicole, Andrea, Seetal and Samar

"The practitioner who led the mindfulness course was absolutely outstanding, I could not recommend her enough - absolutely fabulous thank you again"



Scan to Volunteer at FNUK

Support Groups

We have regional peer support groups throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as a range of UK-Wide specialist support groups meeting online and in-person. For more information on any of these, please visit our website via the QR code or contact us on support@fertilitynetworkuk.org



Support Groups

Jodie's Story: Infertility, Honesty and the Power of Words

Hi, I'm Jodie Nicholson, author of the international bestseller "I(v)F ONLY!" and the award-winning short story "The Hood!". My journey with infertility has been long, painful, and marked by moments I never imagined I'd face.

For six years, my husband and I tried to conceive. The first three were filled with endless tests and treatments, all self-funded. Why? Because in the UK, the funding system isn't built for fairness—it's built on rigid rules that often punish the vulnerable. Because my husband was already a father, our local CCG decided we didn't qualify for NHS-funded treatment. That decision forced us to sell our home just to afford IVF.

It's hard to put into words the toll infertility takes. The physical, financial and emotional impact ripples far beyond the clinic. It strains relationships, challenges your mental health and can isolate you in a world that often doesn't understand. The stigma surrounding infertility makes it even harder to speak up.

That's why I began to write.

By Jodie Nicholson,
FNUK fundraising
manager and
author of I(V)F Only



What started as a daily emotional release quickly became something more powerful—a lifeline. Writing became my catharsis, and eventually, "I(v)F ONLY!" was born. In my book, I lay it all bare: the rawness, the grief, the moments of hope and the everyday realities that often go unspoken. I tackle the tough stuff - mental health, relationship dynamics, blended families, finances and the pressures of work while TTC (trying to conceive).

I share my story not for sympathy, but for solidarity. If my words can help just one person feel less alone in their fertility journey, then every tear, every sacrifice and every page has been worth it.

Infertility shouldn't be hidden in the shadows. The more we talk, the more we understand. And the more we understand, the better we can support one another—at home, in our communities, and yes, even in the workplace.

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Meet the Volunteers and Fundraisers Making a Difference

At the heart of FNUK are the incredible volunteers and fundraisers who give their time, energy and passion to support our mission. Whether they're organising events, sharing their stories or rallying communities to raise funds, these dedicated individuals make an extraordinary impact. Their efforts not only help sustain our work but also bring hope, connection and comfort to those affected by fertility challenges.

Over the past year, our supporters have gone above and beyond in creative and courageous ways. They've run marathons, cycled over hundreds of miles, taken on the Kiltwalk and even put pen to paper - writing powerful poetry that gives voice to the often unseen experiences of fertility struggles. Others have offered their time to support group meetings, share personal stories and raise vital awareness in their communities and online. Every step, word and gesture has helped shine a light and bring comfort to others walking similar paths.

I was inspired by the 2012 Olympics, at the age of 29, to do something meaningful. I had no sporting background and couldn't swim, but that didn't stop me from starting my journey. In 2016, I qualified for Great Britain and competed in my first European Aquathlon Championships for British Triathlon—where I achieved a bronze medal. In just a short space of time, I went on to become a European Aquathlon Champion and a two-time National Champion.

In 2019, I made the move to triathlon and continued to find success, competing at both the European and World Championships. I also became National and British Champion across various distances. I'm proud to serve as a British Triathlon Ambassador and have had the honour of captaining the GB team at international championships.

Outside of sport, I work full time for the NHS as a performance analyst. Despite my sporting achievements, the past four years have brought significant challenges with my mental health—and my wife and I have also faced a long and difficult fertility journey. After nearly six years and four rounds of IVF, we were finally blessed with twin boys.

I volunteer for Fertility Network UK (FNUK) to help others through their own journeys. I've taken part in podcasts, spoken at couples' events and men's talks about fertility, all in support of FNUK.

I first came across FNUK when I was struggling with my mental health while going through IVF. The moment I found them, I knew I wanted to be involved. FNUK is close to my heart, and being part of it gives me the chance to support others in ways I wish I'd had during the toughest moments of my own experience.



Yiannis Christodoulou
HIMfertility Volunteer

My fertility journey has been a challenging experience. I have gone through IVF three times and have undergone myomectomy twice to remove fibroids, along with various other tests. After undergoing these fertility treatments, I have been exploring alternative paths to motherhood.

A few years ago, while searching for a support group in the UK, I discovered the Fertility Network UK Instagram page, where I saw an advert to join the Black Women's Fertility Support Group. The charity approached me and asked if I would like to facilitate the group. After receiving training, I began chairing meetings and connected with women facing similar fertility challenges.

As a volunteer, I have sourced guest speakers to join support meetings, including Dr. Christine Ekechi, Dr. Edi Osagie, and many others. I collaborated with Fertility Network UK and Gaia Family to host a mental health and fertility event. Additionally, I have participated as a panellist for the Fertility Network UK Ethnic Minority Project. I have also organised dinners and assisted in planning the recent Ethnic Minorities' picnic event.

Volunteering is rewarding and gives me a sense of purpose. Over the past four years, I have demonstrated empathy and provided one-on-one support outside meetings. I have witnessed many women achieve success with their treatments and I have received excellent feedback for the support I provide. However, volunteering can also be challenging, as not everyone succeeds with treatment and I am still navigating my fertility journey.

I was recently honoured with the Caribbean and African Health Network Volunteer of the Year Award for my work with the charity. This recognition made me incredibly happy and it feels great to be rewarded for my hard work.

Fertility Network UK is a great charity. Through it, I have made wonderful connections and received invaluable support. As a Black woman, I have greatly benefited from the charity's Ethnic Minority Project, which has been essential during challenging times.

Ogechi Ekwegh
FNUK Volunteer and host of the Black Women's Fertility Support Group



It Can Feel Like a Lonely Place

It can feel like a lonely place,
No one who understands or relates,
Everyone out there seems to have a place.
Fertility UK gives a voice to you,
to share, to express, to talk.
So you don't have to feel lonely anymore.
It can feel like a lonely place to be.
platitudes given, unhelpful remarks from others,
Everyone out there seems to have a place.
Fertility UK gives hope to us all.
to cry, to voice, to release,
So you don't have to feel lonely anymore.
A free space, a free Zoom meeting to join,
Be on camera, be not on camera,
Fertility UK gives that connection to us all.

To find belonging, those who are childless by circumstance, not by choice.

My name is Tavinder Kaur New. I am childless not by choice but by circumstance, and I have been fortunate to be able to write poetry for FNUK. I feel it is important that my voice, as well as those of others who are no longer able to have a child, are heard and represented within social media. I feel that there is exposure for those who are pregnant or have a child, and there is limited understanding of how it feels not to be able to have a child within the public sphere.

I hope that my writing touches others and represents the feelings and emotions around childlessness and raises awareness among others that there are people in society who have undergone tragedy and difficulties. Their voice is important to be heard and valued. I can be followed on [tavinderknew](#) on instagram or [@newtavinder.bsky.social](#). Thank you for reading my writing and I hope it resonates with you.

Tavinder Kaur New
FNUK Volunteer for More To Life community

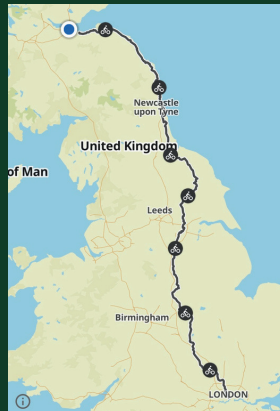
I'm a proud dad to an IVF miracle. He was born after years of struggling and navigating treatment as Covid-19 shut everything down. As a man I found it hard, often on the outside looking in, dealing with the taboo and the social link of fertility to masculinity.

I struggled mentally, had lost my hobbies due to travel restrictions and started running really as a way to find some peace, running through fields, to try and get some perspective on things. By that I mean I'd put on some large sunglasses, run into the middle of nowhere and have a good cry where nobody would see. I'm still running, but generally with a smile (or grimace) these days.

I've since started a Men's Fertility Network, to support male colleagues experiencing the same struggles and have worked alongside Fertility Network UK. Having been successful with IVF, I felt that I had a responsibility to represent others. I'm really proud that this work led to new Baby Loss and IVF policies across the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

All this tied together in April when I ran the Manchester Marathon in aid of Fertility Network UK. It wasn't until the final weeks of my plan that I had the confidence to seek sponsorship and was incredibly grateful to earn over £1000 (inc. Gift Aid). I didn't achieve my target time, given the heat, but quadrupled the amount I hoped to raise.

Luke Dawson
FNUK fundraiser



It's been a privilege to do some recent fundraising for FNUK. I decided to set myself the challenge of cycling from London to South Queensferry, near Edinburgh, over the course of 7 days. Starting in England's capital, I travelled north via Northampton, Nottingham, Selby, Pickering, Sunderland and Berwick-upon-Tweed, averaging around 75 miles per day. The total distance was almost 545 miles! Fortunately the weather was on my side, with most days blessed with sunshine and light winds.

I knew I wanted to do something to support FNUK after our 8.5 year fertility journey. We had a number of rounds of IVF and ICSI, with some funded by the NHS and a few self-funded ones too. We experienced the rollercoaster of hope and grief that characterises the journey of so many. We benefitted from the support of the FNUK forums throughout, as we sought to work out the next steps when things didn't turn out as we hoped.

Throughout my ride, I had a lot of time to reflect on how the fertility journey is often a silent struggle. It was great to be able to bring our journey out into the open and to encourage others, letting them know that they're not alone.

Mark Wright
FNUK fundraiser



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REGIONAL UPDATES

Celebrating 3 Years of Transformative Fertility Support Across England

As Fertility Network UK (FNUK) concludes a transformative three-year project, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, we are proud to reflect on the significant strides made in supporting individuals, couples and families through their fertility journeys. The initiative has created lasting impact, delivering inclusive, targeted and compassionate support across England.

A major focus of the project was enhancing support for ethnic minority communities, recognising the need for culturally tailored information and safe spaces. By appointing a dedicated Ethnic Minority Communities Project Worker, FNUK were able to attend numerous events, reaching 700 people in the first year alone, and continuing to build on that through the duration of the project. Online webinars for these communities attracted over 450 attendees in the final year of the project and our dedicated support groups for Black Women, South Asian and Muslim communities allowed us to further our reach to yet more communities experiencing their own diverse challenges associated with fertility issues. We were also delighted to see our Black Women's group volunteer, Ogechi, win the Black Health Care Awards (Caribbean & African Health Network CAHN) Volunteer of the year 2024, which was a fantastic achievement.

Our ongoing Clinic Ambassador Programme saw us engage with 136 fertility clinics and specialist departments across England. This ensured that our beneficiaries had greater access to information and support at all stages of their treatment and enabled us to highlight the regional support available to clinics for their patients.

Supporting people with a higher BMI, a common treatment barrier, was another key aim. Our targeted nutrition programmes were well received, and our UK-Wide closed Facebook group, for those trying to lose weight, grew by 70% across the 3 years.

Throughout the project we ran numerous online health and wellbeing initiatives including yoga, mindfulness, and nutrition workshops. These sessions often included follow-up resources to enhance participant support.

LGBTQ+ individuals and couples received tailored support through our annual *Pathways to Parenthood* course—a six-week series exploring treatment options, legal rights and lived experiences. We further engaged with the community at Pride in London and the Modern Family Show, expanding visibility and access to support. We also identified a need for our LGBTQ+ support groups to evolve into more targeted subgroups based on the stages of their journey and these were developed via WhatsApp to provide more tailored avenues of support.

We would like to extend our **thanks to The National Lottery (TNL) Community Fund**, our funders for this 3-year project, for their generous support and belief in our mission. This investment has allowed us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of many, which is demonstrated in the positive feedback received over the 3 years of the project. Fertility Network UK remains committed to providing support and information to those navigating their fertility journey and beyond, ensuring, those going through a fertility journey do not feel isolated or alone and have a supportive community that understands the impact of a fertility journey, whatever that looks like for the individual experiencing it.

Northern Ireland Steps Forward on Fertility and Trauma Care

Support in Northern Ireland has been busier than ever as more new patients are finding help and compassion from our team.

For those trying to conceive, our Donor Information Evening brought together a panel of experienced health professionals and parents who have chosen this route to answer a Q&A session for those considering donor conception. The expert panel included BICA counsellor Gerry McCluskey, Sharon Davidson facilitator with Donor Conception Network and parents of donor conceived children. The panel addressed the issues of 'Talking and Telling', speaking to their children about donor conception and how to introduce this and at what age. Both the panel and parents recommended starting as early as possible and using this to practise how you bring this open approach into the family.

Our NI More to Life 'Walk and Connect' meetings across the year helped to introduce new members to the group.

Additional activities such as Journalling and creative writing and a Mindfulness workshop in August with wonderful facilitator Veronica Ellis have helped to offer resources in how to adjust to a life childless not by choice. We continue to raise awareness amongst employers of the challenges that childless communities face in the workplace and improve workplace culture and understanding.

Our ACeBabe's group supports those whose treatment is successful but feel anxiety during pregnancy and in early parenthood. We know that unresolved trauma from a fertility journey often persists in the following years and should be recognised.

We were pleased to return to face-to-face meetings this year, with Spring at a soft play area and for a Christmas treat, to the Jungle NI Christmas Wonderland, which was enjoyed by all.

We hope to hear more good news this year about a move in NI to a second NHS funded IVF cycle but are still awaiting an announcement by the NI Department of Health.

Our work in highlighting research into the extent and understanding of Trauma in Infertility has continued this year. We held a second online event for health professionals to outline the overall research findings from our collaborative research with Cardiff University, Queens University Belfast and BICA.

"Only by coming together and sharing experiences can we uncover the hidden burden of trauma within infertility—and finally begin to improve fertility care for those who need it most."

Ongoing research with Cardiff University will now take place over the next year with a new project using Delphi methodology, working with a panel of up to 50 health professionals and those with lived experience of infertility to collectively design a series of agreed recommendations for best practice in fertility care. It is the next stage in the work started here in NI in 2022 to uncover the hidden burden of trauma within infertility journeys. Only by coming together and sharing experiences will we be able to identify triggers for trauma in a fertility journey and finally be able to improve fertility care to reduce this trauma burden for patients. It is hoped that the final recommendations will be available in 2026.

Knowing how much Pregnancy Loss contributes to trauma for our patients, Fertility Network in NI has joined a collective of 13 NI charities who provide support to those who have suffered pregnancy loss. The aim is to join resources and share ideas and information for those who have suffered a pregnancy loss and are seeking support.

SCOTLAND

Fertility Network Scotland (FNS) has recently completed a three month project which ran from January until March 2025, funded by the Scottish Government 'Improving Health and Wellbeing' Division.

The two key areas of the project focussed on Pregnancy loss during an infertility journey and high BMI/obesity requiring Weight loss to access fertility treatment.

Support was offered through a number of channels including:

- One to one support for patients/beneficiaries with experienced Scotland staff and volunteers.
- Specialist online support groups for both Pregnancy loss and Weight loss to relieve distress and provide an understanding community offering coping mechanisms. The Pregnancy loss support group meetings were facilitated by a British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA) counsellor and the Weight loss support group meetings were facilitated by a qualified Nutritionist.
- Wellbeing and educational courses in Mindfulness and Fertility Nutrition for Weight loss to promote both emotional health and wellbeing, increase knowledge and reduce trauma. The two Mindfulness courses were offered by a qualified Mindfulness teacher and the Fertility Nutrition for Weight Loss course was offered by a qualified Nutritionist. 100% of participants in the Mindfulness courses recorded improvements in their wellbeing. The Nutrition courses are a permanent, free resource on our YouTube channel at <https://rb.gy/ijo7vh>.
- Walk and Talks in face-to-face peer groups and with FNS volunteers across Scotland in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee to reduce isolation of fertility patients.
- Development of Counselling and Wellbeing support training materials for Scotland staff and volunteers who support patients with distressing personal experiences, to reduce staff and volunteer distress, potential vicarious or secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.
- Raising awareness of FNS support for patients with health professionals, GPs and Fertility Clinics to encourage referral to FNS services.
- Linking and collaborating with other Pregnancy loss organisations in Scotland and the UK, to increase awareness of the specific needs of those suffering from pregnancy loss during an infertility journey.
- Raising awareness with patients/beneficiaries of additional contacts in Scotland who offer support for pregnancy loss through web and factsheet information.
- Raising awareness of a new Directive for Scotland, England and Wales which recommends employers offer a minimum of 3 days, or, preferably, two weeks' paid time off after pregnancy loss. You can read more about our FITW programme and its recommendations here <https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/resources/>.
- We have created sustainable and ongoing support activities for patients following this current project by recruiting new volunteers and establishing peer support groups along with an information base and increased awareness of support for these targeted beneficiaries and health professionals.

We have supported many more beneficiaries than we anticipated and have created enduring resources and capacity, which will continue to provide support for these groups and individuals. We have also been able to offer One-to-one support for beneficiaries through volunteers and staff in Scotland project. In the short 3-month period of the project we have achieved much, and we are absolutely delighted to share that we have been given funding to continue this work until the end of March 2026.

WALES

Our very successful five year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund concluded last November. This project really helped to launch us in Wales and we were delighted to be successful in our bid for a new project, again funded by the National Lottery Community Fund which began on 1st April this year. The new project will of course continue to build upon the strong foundations already laid but will focus on four key areas: Support, Collaborative Working, Preventative Education and Employers and Employees.

Support

Those affected by infertility and childlessness in Wales will have equitable access to emotional/practical support reducing isolation/trauma.

Fertility Network Wales has been developing a community network of individuals as volunteers who help and support each other through participation in groups and events and in the distribution and dissemination of information. Through webinars, social media and direct contact at events, people have come together to voice their needs. All Wales beneficiaries have access to FNUK resources including our specialist UK online support groups for specific needs such as Black Women, LGBTQ+, More to Life, 40+ etc.

Collaborative Working

Collaborative working with primary care and health professionals will improve timely and compassionate care for fertility patients.

Our extensive networks of partner organisations are key to our continuing collaborations and joined up approach. Our work to set up the Fertility Forum for Wales for healthcare professionals is a direct aim to increase a collaborative and community approach to seek solutions together.

Through the goodwill and free collaborations with the extensive networks in our wider community of healthcare professionals, commissioners, beneficiaries, academic experts and many other stakeholder groups, we receive encouragement, knowledge, support and advocacy for our work.

Preventative Education

Preventative education for a diverse range of young people empowers them to make healthy lifestyle choices and reduce their future risk of infertility.

Young people in NEET communities and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas lack knowledge about the factors impacting future fertility and are at risk of a higher than average rate of infertility. Early intervention education programmes are vital for these hard-to-reach groups. We will continue to work with third level educational organisations to circulate information that promotes fertility fitness amongst young people and demonstrates the link between adverse lifestyle issues eg alcohol and drug abuse, use of steroids, STIs, eating disorders and overall age which may reduce the ability to conceive in future years.

Employers and Employees

Employers and employees are empowered with knowledge to create fertility friendly workplaces that reduce workplace distress for employees.

In Wales, beneficiaries tell us that they experience a lack of emotional support and understanding during treatment not only from family and friends and healthcare professionals, but increasingly also find the workplace an unsupportive environment. Our Fertility in the Workplace programme of support for employees and employers in Wales aims to address this and we will work with employers to create supportive and flexible workplaces for employees suffering from infertility, whether going through treatment or being childless not by choice as a result of failed treatment.

UNSPOKEN: THE FERTILITY NETWORK PODCAST



*listen
here!*



Anita Guru

Host of Unspoken: The Fertility Network Podcast

In a world where fertility struggles are still too often met with silence, Unspoken: The Fertility Network Podcast is creating space for truth, empathy and connection. Launched in November 2024 during Fertility Awareness Week, the podcast is hosted by Coach and advocate Anita Guru, who brings sensitivity and insight to each episode.

From the outset, Unspoken set out to amplify voices rarely heard and stories rarely told. Season 1 delivered on that promise with a powerful line up of guests, each offering unique insights into the complex, emotional, and often misunderstood world of fertility.

Listeners were drawn in by candid conversations with broadcaster Andrea Byrne, who spoke movingly about her own fertility journey and the importance of representation for those experiencing infertility. Fertility expert Dr Thanos Papathanasiou provided clinical context, explaining the evolution of IVF treatment and the emotional weight carried by patients undergoing it. Acclaimed screenwriter Jack Thorne and wife Rach Mason, co-writers of the Netflix hit film Joy, spoke about their own personal experiences with infertility and about the journey of making the film.

Among the standout guests was Grace MacDonald, whose story is nothing short of historic. Grace is the mother of the world's first IVF boy, Alastair MacDonald, born in 1979, just a year after Louise Brown, the first IVF baby. Her conversation with Anita offered a rare glimpse into the earliest days of IVF treatment. Grace spoke openly about what it meant to be part of a pioneering medical journey, the uncertainty that surrounded the procedure at the time, and the societal attitudes toward fertility treatment more than four decades ago. Her story reminded listeners how far we've come, but also how many challenges remain.

Ruth Corden added further depth to the season, sharing personal stories of living with childlessness and the emotional resilience it demands. Kim Stubbs from HSBC discussed corporate responsibility and the steps employers can take to support employees undergoing fertility treatment, highlighting the need for fertility-friendly policies and compassionate leadership.

Each episode in Season 1 illuminated different aspects of the fertility experience - emotional, clinical, social, and professional, but more than anything, the podcast created space for people to feel heard and validated.

Unspoken returned for Season 2 on 19th May 2025, with an equally powerful line up of guests and stories. The season opened with Jessica Hepburn - author, adventurer, and fertility campaigner, whose long-standing affiliation with Fertility Network UK and fearless storytelling make her an ideal guest. Her episode is a moving and motivating start to the new season.

At its core, Unspoken is about breaking taboos, challenging stigma, and creating community. Fertility issues can be isolating and overwhelming, but through storytelling and shared experience, this podcast offers a lifeline. Whether you're on your own path to parenthood, supporting a loved one, or seeking to better understand these journeys, Unspoken is a must-listen.

Above all, the hope is that Unspoken helps people feel less alone and more empowered in whatever chapter of the fertility story they find themselves.

About the Host

Anita's journey with infertility started after a diagnosis of endometriosis in 2015, followed by 5 surgeries and 5 rounds of IVF. Anita started supporting women when she became a volunteer with Fertility Network in 2016 by starting the South Asian Support group; with her Indian heritage, she knows the challenges for this community when it comes to infertility. She uses her story to raise awareness having appeared on TV, newspapers and articles. Anita was working at Fertility Network UK when she launched the podcast with the charity Fertility Network UK and has reached so many people with her own story.

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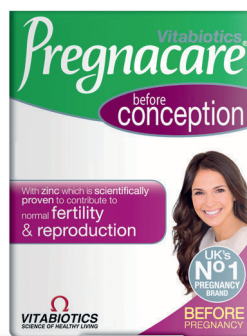
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New HFEA data dives into the experiences of 1,500 fertility patients

Every three years, we run our National Patient Survey, which explores the patient experience of fertility treatment in the UK and highlights change over the years. Responses from the 2024 survey have provided valuable evidence of the experience and views of a representative sample of over 1,500 fertility patients that will inform our future work, as well as wider conversations about UK healthcare.

Patient satisfaction has stayed at over 70% for the past decade

73% of patients were satisfied with their latest round of treatment, which is in line with our previous surveys in 2018 and 2021. We're pleased to see this, particularly given the general public's opinion on the state of healthcare in the UK after NHS satisfaction reached a record low in 2023.

However, there were variations within this. For example, patients in the North East of England reported the highest satisfaction levels (86%*) compared to the lowest in Wales (68%*). Although there was no marked difference in satisfaction between NHS and self-funded patients, there were large differences for Asian and Black patients, who were less likely to have reported being satisfied with their treatment (50% and 59%* respectively). This may be due to lower birth rates and NHS-funded treatment among these groups.

When it came to communicating specific aspects of treatment, satisfaction was highest (93%) when it came to patients understanding what they were consenting to, compared to just under a quarter (73%) of patients feeling their own chance of success was clearly communicated. We, again saw some differences within patient groups where improvements need to be made. For example, Black and White patients were more likely to report that their chance of success had been explained clearly compared to Asian and Mixed patients.

It is worrying that there are disparities when it comes to patients from different ethnic groups. We continue to call for action so that patients and their partners are not left behind in access to fertility treatment and their experience of fertility treatment.

*By Julia Chain,
Chair of the HFEA*



Location remains the most important factor when choosing a clinic

For the patients that are choosing their own clinic, with so many clinics to choose from, deciding which one best meets your needs can feel a bit overwhelming as there are many factors to consider. We've found that location remains the most important factor (62%) increasing by more than 10% since our first survey in 2018.

Meanwhile, cost was recorded as more important for Black patients and single patients, likely relating to lower levels of NHS funding available for these patient groups.

"It is worrying that there are disparities when it comes to patients from different ethnic groups. We continue to call for action so that patients and their partners are not left behind in access to, and their experience of, fertility treatment."

Use of donor eggs, sperm, and embryos remains the same as previous years

Just over a quarter of respondents had used donor eggs, sperm or embryos (27%), with donor sperm being most common – which mirrors the results of our 2021 survey.

However, there were differences when it came to ease of access, with 70% of patients using donor sperm saying it was easy to access compared to 59%* of those using donor eggs.

Around half of patients using donor sperm used overseas donors, saying this was mainly due to increased choice and more information about the donor available. Of these patients, around a third reported a lack of clarity on communication of family limits for overseas donors.

This is disappointing as the HFEA's Code of Practice sets out that clinics should explain the ten-family limit guidance on donation to patients, where one donor's sperm can only be used to create up to ten families in the UK, and make sure patients understand before starting treatment that donors may also have donated abroad where the ten-family limit does not apply.

“As part of our response to the government’s ten-year plan, we want to see a much shorter time for patients to begin fertility treatment once they have received advice or a referral from their GP.”

Wait times are longer for NHS patients

Our data shows that the number of NHS-funded cycles continues to fall, and some patients said that finding it difficult to get NHS funding or being confused about what treatments would be available to them were reasons why they decided to go private

Almost 80% of patients spoke to a GP about their options before starting treatment, but NHS-funded patients reported longer wait times than self-funded patients after this, with just over half of self-funded patients starting treatment within a year compared to just over a third of NHS patients.

We are concerned that NHS-funded patients are waiting longer than self-funded patients to start fertility treatment. The delays faced by NHS patients highlight ongoing issues relating to the provision of specialist care for women.

The survey found that most delays were due to waiting for referrals, appointments, investigations, and/or needing further tests or surgery.

While patients most commonly began treatment between 7 and 12 months after seeing their GP (30%), 16% waited more than two years, which could have a negative effect on outcomes given that success rates from fertility treatment decrease with age.

As part of our response to the government’s ten-year plan, we want to see a much shorter time for patients to begin fertility treatment once they have received advice or a referral from their GP.

There are small base sizes for some sub-groups. Where this is the case, we have flagged this with an asterisk (*).

To read the full report , scan the QR code below



Lost Beginnings:

A story about the heartache of infertility

**By Ben Wicks,
Co-Founder and Executive
Producer @fieldendfilms**

Lost Beginnings is a story about the heartache of infertility, shining a light on the impact it can have on the mental health of couples and lasting effects on relationships.

When writing the project, it was essential to me to involve a charity at the earliest possible moment to ensure that what was created on screen was true to the experiences that couples were facing. **FNUK** provided invaluable feedback on the script and helped shape the narrative to ensure it resonated with as many people as possible. We were also very lucky to have **Fertility Action** support us in ensuring the film reached audiences far and wide through promotion on their social media accounts.



I've been making films for just over ten years. In that time, I've shot tv pilots, concepts, a sci-fi and even a World War Two musical but time and time again I am drawn back to drama. Family drama, relationship drama, real life drama. Over those ten years, I have made films for multiple charities including Alzheimer's Research and Child Bereavement UK. *Lost Beginnings* was born out of real life experiences both first and second hand. I have friends that are sadly going through a difficult fertility journey and I wanted to showcase an unfiltered look at the impact infertility can have on both mental health and the strain on relationships, not a glammed up 'Hollywood' account, but a true-to-life, almost documentary approach.

We made the film with zero budget! We drew together a team of some of the best creatives around who came on board as they believed in the project and most of the crew had either experienced first hand some of the topics in the film or had family members or friends who had. The two couples in the film are both real life couples who I had worked with before numerous times; it was essential to me and for the story that their relationships were believable in order to sell the story! We shot on location in Surrey over two days.

"I wanted to showcase an unfiltered look at the impact infertility can have on both mental health and relationships — not a glammed-up 'Hollywood' account, but a true-to-life, almost documentary approach."

I really hope that the film raises further awareness of the impact infertility can have on mental health and the strains it can put on relationships. I also hope that it makes audiences think twice before assuming that a couple can even have children, especially before asking questions such as "when are you having kids?" and "surely, you want kids, you've been together long enough". My wife and I were getting these questions constantly and whilst we personally have no problems with fertility, we could still see the impact it was having.

"Working with Ben on Lost Beginnings was incredibly meaningful. Infertility affects 1 in 6 people and can place huge emotional strain on mental health and relationships. Ben's honest, compassionate storytelling brings visibility to a struggle that's too often hidden".
Sarah from FNUK.

We're currently finalising post-production and planning the release of *Lost Beginnings*. We can't wait to bring this story to screens and continue raising awareness of the emotional impact of infertility. Watch this space!

Fertility In the Workplace



Seema Duggal

Fertility in the Workplace Coordinator

We speak to Seema Duggal from the Fertility in the Workplace team, who shares why understanding fertility at work matters. Drawing on her own experience, she's passionate about supporting others and helping companies recognise the impact of fertility struggles in the workplace.

Tell us about Fertility in the Workplace and how it could benefit organisations. How can they get involved?

Fertility In the Workplace is part of the UK's leading patient fertility charity - Fertility Network UK. 1 in 6 of us worldwide are currently experiencing fertility problems and many of us are in employment.

Our research has shown that most people experiencing fertility problems are reluctant to speak to their employer because they fear it may have a detrimental effect on their career. Many reduce hours or leave jobs due to a lack of support, which can be costly for businesses. Our Fertility in the Workplace initiative can help your business to implement a fertility policy and will ensure your staff and managers understand the impact of fertility and treatment so they can support those around them.

As the national charity, we provide a unique service bringing our experience and expertise in the field, as well as offering our ongoing support package to employees to ensure that no one experiencing fertility problems ever needs to feel alone. We offer bespoke services tailored to your business such as online webinars, general advice, manager factsheets etc.

What's the best way to offer support if a colleague shares they're experiencing fertility issues?

Many managers speak of feeling overwhelmed by discussing these issues at work. It's important to know that you don't have to be a medical expert or to have all the answers, you just need to be there to listen and offer support. Some key tips for managers are:

- Do some research and use resources from external organisations such as Fertility Network UK
- Create a plan together to prioritise treatment
- Be available throughout the process to check-in on how things are progressing - some people may want less involvement than others, but it's important that there's at least an option for regular check-ins.
- The process can be mentally and physically exhausting, so flexible working options and ongoing support are essential.

When it comes to supporting an employee with fertility issues generally, what would you say are the key considerations that employers need to have?

Providing flexible working options and understanding is key to supporting the individual staff member – an understanding employer can make all the difference.

One vital first step is understanding the complex impact of both infertility and its treatment. That's why a core part of Fertility Network's Fertility in the Workplace initiative involves providing tailored support to help staff and managers understand the emotional, physical, financial and social toll infertility can wreak.

If employers have the necessary information and confidence, they can then enable staff going through fertility treatment to feel supported and happy at work. Understanding the demands of treatment is also key. IVF is time intensive and time sensitive. Our research found the average person going through an IVF cycle will need between 8-10 flexible working days for appointments, scans, egg collection and embryo transfer. Clinic appointments often overrun or must be booked at the last minute, meaning workplace flexibility is essential. Yet there is no legal right to time off work for fertility treatment and people often end up using their annual leave or taking unpaid leave.

FitW can support your organisation with webinars, policy guidance and 1:1 support for staff and managers.

Email fitw@fertilitynetworkuk.org or scan the QR code to get involved.



Evolving with care:

How fertility clinics should go about meeting the needs of their patients



By Dr Thanos Papathanasiou,
Chief Executive Officer and
Medical Director at Bourn Hall
Clinic www.bournhall.co.uk

The demographics of people seeking fertility treatment are changing and fertility clinics need to evolve with them in order to meet the needs of patients with busy work and personal lives. Gone are the days where fertility clinics could demand when, where and how patients would fit in with the operational structure of a clinic. In this article, Dr Thanos Papathanasiou, Chief Executive Officer and Medical Director of Bourn Hall Fertility Clinic, reflects on how fertility treatments and clinics are changing and how their clinic is adapting to support patients every step of the way.

The government-led Women's Health Strategy recently made a number of commitments, with fertility and infertility being included as a key focus. Long term ambitions include an emphasis on normalising fertility and to making associated taboos a thing of the past.

A report from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) highlights a number of trends:

- UK fertility treatment numbers have risen by 10% between 2019 and 2021
- Privately funded treatment is increasing
- The average IVF patient is getting older, increasing to 36 years old, and donors' average age is now 34 years old
- Patient demographics are changing: single patients and patients in female same-sex relationships have seen the largest increase in IVF usage and demand for egg freezing continues to rise
- Pregnancy success rates are improving

Additionally, there is an increased appreciation of the mental health impact on infertility and fertility treatment. FNUK's own survey, 'The impact of fertility challenges and treatment' published in October 2022 reported that 83% of respondents felt sad, frustrated and worried, 47% experienced feelings of depression and but more worryingly a total of 40% experienced suicidal feelings.



Pictured: Bourn Hall Clinic

What does this mean for fertility clinics?

Given the changing profile of patients, lifestyles and needs, clinics must commit to a continuous critique of their processes, policies, and practices to ensure that they meet these needs. Being introspective will not serve our patients well. *Some of the questions we have been asking ourselves are:*

Do we provide truly individualised care (not just on a clinical level) but also on personal level, aiming to address individual concerns, worries, expectations and emotional needs?

How do we support patients throughout their entire journey?

Do we provide sufficient flexibility to support patients around work and other commitments?

Do we offer specialised treatments and services to cater to the specific needs of older patients?

Are single patients, patients in female same-sex relationships and other minority groups well represented within the clinic's culture and policies?

Do we offer flexible payment options?

How do we engage with the patient communities to ensure that we continue to reflect community needs?

How do we engage with other stakeholders such as policymakers and charities to ensure that future policies reflect the needs of our patients?

We know that only by regularly asking these questions, reviewing our processes and embracing change, will we be able to fulfil our ambition of truly serving our patients.

In our quest to serve patients and support them holistically – beyond the clinical need – we have taken this one step further and have engaged with FNUK and invited the charity to speak to our teams to share the findings from its survey. Then, we designed and delivered training for our patient-facing teams ('Emotional Support for Patients') to upskill our teams and to ensure that patients are supported throughout their entire journey with us. The training was designed to develop a practical skill set for our staff, to promote real, empathetic engagement with our patients.

Another of our priorities is ensure that we meet the needs of working patients. We have been working on improving our accessibility and flexibility, to allow working patients more options around their fertility journey. We also want to empower patients to have meaningful conversations with their employers about their journey. Finally, as an employer, Bourn Hall is steering the implementation of its own fertility-friendly workplace policy. We are hugely supportive of the work being conducted by FNUK in this area.

A brave new future

There has been a lot of discussion and debate about what the technology future looks like for UK fertility clinics. Artificial intelligence (AI) is probably the most-debated topic to emerge and it is already being explored within IVF as a tool for gamete and embryo selection.

AI also presents many other opportunities for enhanced patient support such as designing more personalised treatment plans, facilitating and expediting the patient journey and result reporting, to name a few.

We should not, however, rely on AI and technology to replace human contact. It is through this that we feel that we can provide enhanced patient support during what can be an undeniably emotionally-fraught journey through fertility treatment for many.



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With you every step of the way

Start your fertility journey with Bourn Hall and you'll benefit from our constant support every step of the way.

From consultation, throughout your fertility treatment, to aftercare, enjoy personalised help on your path to parenthood.

With a pregnancy success of 73% for women under 35 in their first year of treatment, you can put your trust in us to help you start your family.

To find out more, call our patient services team on 01954 717210 or email info@bourn-hall.com

bournhall.co.uk

The graphic features a dark purple background with a large white semi-circle. The top right corner is decorated with a pattern of small, colorful circles. At the bottom, there is a stylized illustration of a dandelion seed head with seeds blowing away, set against a white curved shape that mirrors the one above.

The Patient Promise



Why Join the Patient Promise?

Be recognised for putting patient wellbeing first. By signing up to our Patient Promise, your clinic shows a clear commitment to the emotional and mental wellbeing of fertility patients—not just their physical care. As the UK's largest fertility support charity, we understand that patients need more than just medical treatment; they need compassion, clarity, and consistent support throughout their journey. Joining the Patient Promise means your clinic is not just treating patients; you're supporting them emotionally and mentally throughout their journey.

Ready to Make a Difference? - To learn more about joining the Patient Promise and how it can benefit your clinic and patients, please contact us or scan the QR code.



Bourn Hall
FERTILITY CLINIC



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Advanced Reproductive Medicine



 **TFP**
Fertility · We Make Families

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