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BOURN HALL SAYS EXCELLENT PATIENT RESPONSE TO IVF FUNDING INITIATIVE

East of England first region in country to end IVF treatment lottery

There has been a positive response to the new IVF funding initiative introduced in the East of England 6 weeks ago, according to Bourn Hall, one of the scheme's IVF providers. The new initiative guarantees free access to a comprehensive package of fertility treatment for eligible patients in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.

From 1st May 2009 the East of England became the first region in the country to provide NHS funding to ALL eligible couples for up to six attempts at achieving a pregnancy with fertility treatment, thus removing the current IVF postcode lottery where couples in adjacent towns are offered widely differing services.

The initiative has been warmly welcomed by Dr Mike Macnamee, Chief Executive of Bourn Hall Clinic which was established by IVF pioneers Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards:

"It was always the dream of Steptoe and Edwards when they established Bourn Hall as the world's first IVF clinic, that treatment would be available to all who needed it. We are delighted that the East of England is taking a lead in making IVF more widely accessible and creating a clearer and more consistent treatment pathway across the Primary Care Trusts.

"The launch of the scheme is going smoothly and we are keeping up with patient demand. We have been delighted by the response to the initiative," he says.

To qualify for treatment couples must meet specific eligibility criteria. In particular women must be aged between 23 and 39 with no children from the current relationship. Women must also be registered with a GP in one of the six counties in the East of England.

In the general population 70 percent of couples will conceive naturally within 18 months of trying for a baby and 90 percent after two years. The chance of natural conception can be improved through greater awareness of the woman's monthly cycle and by making lifestyle changes such as stopping smoking, improving diet and losing weight. Couples that have already taken these measures and not conceived, or have a diagnosed cause of infertility, should see their GP to discuss the next steps.

GPs will refer couples with fertility issues to the relevant hospital where checks such as hormone tests will be undertaken to try and identify the cause of infertility. The couple will then be able to have treatment at a specialist fertility clinic. Bourn Hall has excellent success rates and prides itself in managing a very successful donor sperm bank as well as egg and embryo donation programmes. If the infertility is unexplained, conception may happen naturally given more time so couples may have to wait 3 years before the NHS will fund treatment.

Mike Macnamee believes that simplifying the pathway (from GP, through hospital, to providers such as Bourn Hall) and clarifying the eligibility criteria will also reduce stress for patients.

“The team at Bourn Hall is the most experienced in the country as we were the first to offer IVF treatment. Over half of our patients become pregnant on the first attempt and we treat patients with some of the most challenging medical conditions. Patients who come for treatment here are happy that they have received the highest quality of care, whatever the outcome.”

Bourn Hall is located in a Jacobean country house in the village of Bourn just 20 minutes from Cambridge. For more details please see the website www.bourn-hall-clinic.co.uk or call 01954 719111.

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About Bourn Hall Clinic www.bourn-hall-clinic.co.uk

Bourn Hall Clinic, the world's first and best known assisted conception clinic, was established in 1980 by Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards, the pioneers of IVF. Through innovative thinking the clinic maintains a leading role in the field.

Bourn Hall Clinic is an operating division of Bourn Hall Limited, and is located at Bourn Hall, Bourn, Cambridge, CB23 2TN, UK Tel: 01954 719 111.

Notes for editors

Six attempts includes a maximum of three full cycles of IVF treatment with up to three further frozen embryo transfers, totalling six embryo transfers.

More information about the East of England Specialist Commissioning Group's announcement is available. <http://www.escg.nhs.uk>

The Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in the East of England have agreed a new fertility policy that will offer more chances to childless couples. They have, by raising and standardising the number of fertility cycles that were previously offered in the region, fully embraced the recommendations made by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) in 2004.

Primary Care Trusts

Bedfordshire PCT

Luton PCT

Cambridgeshire PCT

Peterborough PCT

Mid Essex PCT

West Essex PCT

South East Essex PCT

South West Essex PCT

North East Essex PCT

East and North Hertfordshire PCT

West Hertfordshire PCT

Norfolk PCT

Great Yarmouth and Waveney PCT

Suffolk PCT

Referral Centres

Bedford Hospital NHS Trust

Luton and Dunstable NHS Foundation Trust

Cambridgeshire University Hospitals Foundation Trust

Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust

Peterborough & Stamford Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Essex Rivers Health Care NHS Trust
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust
Basildon & Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Southend University Hospital Foundation Trust
East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
James Paget University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Norfolk and Norwich University
Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Trust
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust