



The Shrewsbury and  
Telford Hospital  
NHS Trust

## Patient Information

The Shropshire and Mid Wales

Fertility Centre

### Welfare of the Child Assessment - What you need to know

#### Shropshire and Mid Wales Fertility Centre

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## **Introduction**

During your first appointment at the fertility clinic, the nurse will ask you a number of questions about your medical history. She will also ask you questions relating to your home life, either in person or by asking you to complete a questionnaire. These questions are part of an assessment, known as the **welfare of the child assessment (WOC)**, which clinics are required to perform in order to know whether any child born of following fertility treatment is likely to face serious medical, physical or psychological harm. You will also be asked questions at your medical appointment(s).

## **Why do clinics ask these questions?**

Fertility clinics offering treatments such as In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) and egg or sperm donations have a legal requirement to consider the welfare of any child who may be born as a result of fertility treatment. Our regulator is the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) and it is their responsibility to provide clinics with guidelines on how to comply with this legal requirement. These guidelines were last updated in January 2019.

## **What are the criteria for making the assessment?**

The HFEA's updated guidelines now mean that there is a presumption to provide treatment, unless there is evidence that the child is likely to experience serious harm. This means that most patients, whose circumstances raise no concerns at all, are able to proceed with treatment with the minimum of delay. However, it also means that where, in a very small number of cases, where there are serious concerns about a prospective child's welfare, treatment may not be provided. The department may have to investigate if they are unsure whether there are any Welfare of the Child issues (e.g. in cases of previous or current mental illness), but following these investigations most patients/couples are able to be treated.

## **What kind of information is the clinic looking for?**

We will ask you questions relating to the following issues:

- Previous convictions related to harming children
- Contact with social services over the care of any existing children
- Serious violence or unrest within the family
- Serious drug or alcohol abuse
- Serious mental or physical conditions and the risk to the child of a serious medical condition
- Other similar issues which may give cause for concern

## **Will all patients undergo an assessment?**

All women and their partners (if applicable) having any treatment at a clinic licensed by the HFEA, must undergo a welfare of the child assessment. The assessment process is the same for anyone having fertility treatment.

## **How will the information be collected?**

We will collect information from you before you are accepted for treatment. The answers that you provide will be recorded in your fertility notes with will be held securely and in confidence.

## **If I answer yes to the questions asked, will I still be considered for treatment?**

Each case is decided on an individual basis and patients' circumstances are given fair consideration. Some information provided by you might prompt the clinic to seek further information, but this doesn't necessarily mean that you will be turned down for treatment. It is important to give honest answers to the questions asked and to be helpful if further information is needed.

## **Will the clinic need to ask for information from anyone other than me and my partner?**

Most of the time, the clinic will be satisfied with the information that you provide. Sometimes we might need to speak to your GP, a relevant medical specialist, counsellor or another relevant professional; such as a probation officer. If the clinic does wish to contact such a person we will ask you and seek your permission. The clinic may also ask you to see the fertility counsellor and ask their opinion on the case.

## **What if I don't want to consent to the clinic contacting my GP or other professional?**

You don't have to give your permission, but the clinic will consider this when they make a decision on whether or not to provide treatment. If you have a good reason why you don't want a particular person to be contacted please let us know.

## **Will I need another assessment?**

We will repeat a 'welfare of the child assessment' if:

- It has been two years or more since your last contact with the clinic
- You have changed partner
- You have had a child or there has been a change in your circumstances.

This is necessary because such changes in your circumstances may mean that new information needs to be taken into consideration.

## **Who will make the final decision about whether or not I get treatment?**

The clinic gives approval for treatment to start once it is satisfied that your prospective child is unlikely to suffer serious harm. If there is any need for further information your case will be discussed in confidence with other members of staff at the clinic or occasionally and ethics committee. The person who is named on the clinic's HFEA licence (known as the person responsible) is ultimately responsible for the decision about whether or not to provide treatment.

## **Will the assessment process delay my treatment starting?**

For most patients, the assessment process will be quick and straightforward. In some cases, however, more information and discussion may be needed and this may include contacting other health or social care professionals. This can delay the start of treatment, though we will try to resolve matters with you as quickly as possible.

## If I am turned down for treatment, what right to appeal do I have?

If the clinic decides to refuse treatment as a result of the assessment, you will be given the following information:

- Why you were refused treatment and, where appropriate, any circumstances which may cause the clinic to reconsider.
- What other options are available to you.
- What counselling services are available to you.

If you feel that you have been unfairly treated or the clinic has failed to consider information that you think is relevant, the first step to take is to appeal to your clinic to reconsider the decision. If you feel that the clinic had failed to comply with HFEA guidelines when making their decision, you should contact the HFEA to make a complaint.

### Find out more

For more information on how to make a complaint, go to:

<https://www.hfea.gov.uk/contact-us/making-a-complaint-about-a-fertility-clinic/>

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act:

[www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga\\_19900037\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga_19900037_en_1.htm)

HFEA Code of Practice: <https://portal.hfea.gov.uk/media/1527/2019-12-16-code-of-practice-9th-edition-december-2019.pdf>

Contact details for the HFEA can be found on their website: [www.hfea.gov.uk](http://www.hfea.gov.uk) or telephone 020 7291 8200

## Contact details for more information

### Useful telephone numbers

Fertility nursing team **01743 261202** or call the hospital switchboard on **01743 261000** and ask to be put through to the Fertility unit. Please note the department accepts calls from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. **Further information is available from;**

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

We act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, liaising with staff, managers and where appropriate, relevant organisations to negotiate immediate or prompt solutions. We can also help you get support from other local or national agencies.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: 0800 783 0057 or 01743 261691

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: 01952 282888

## Other Sources of Information

### NHS 111

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Telephone: 111 (free from a landline or mobile)

Website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Patient UK

Provides leaflets on health and disease translated into 11 other languages as well as links to national support/self-help groups and a directory of UK health websites.

Website: [www.patient.info](http://www.patient.info)

## Special Needs Information

Please contact the Fertility Unit if you need this information in a different format.

Website: [www.sath.nhs.uk](http://www.sath.nhs.uk)

[www.shropshireivf.nhs.uk](http://www.shropshireivf.nhs.uk)

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