



PRESS STATEMENT

Source: Progress Educational Trust

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England versus Scotland; Progress Educational Trust responds to HFEA's Trends in Fertility Treatment 2017 report

Sarah Norcross, director of fertility campaign group PET, said: 'The HFEA's Trends in Fertility Treatment 2017 report illustrates starkly the results of two different approaches to NHS funding of IVF in the UK: the sustained disinvestment seen in recent years in England versus Scotland's policy, since April 2017, of following the recommended fertility guidelines and providing three full IVF cycles for women under 40. England's piecemeal approach means only one-third of patients (35 per cent) can now access NHS fertility treatment, while in Scotland nearly two-thirds can (62 per cent). This appalling divide between the countries is set to widen: since the start of 2017, one in five of England's clinical commissioning groups has cut or removed NHS fertility services and a further ten CCGs are considering changes, according to Fertility Fairness data. Latest figures show just 12 per cent of CCGs follow national guidance and provide three full IVF cycles.'

Sarah Norcross added: 'PET is also concerned to see that the HFEA's data on egg freezing - the fastest growing sector of the fertility industry - reveals that more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of women freezing their eggs are 35 and over, when it is known that the chance of IVF success is greater if egg freezing takes place before age 35. Is the current policy on egg freezing for non-medical reasons, with its ten-year limit on storage, encouraging women to have expensive, invasive, and sub-optimal treatment? Are fertility clinics doing enough when advising women of the likelihood of a future pregnancy?'

ENDS

Notes for editors

For media interviews and case studies, contact head of communications Catherine Hill at chill@progress.org.uk

1. National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline recommends three full cycles of IVF for women under 40 years and one full cycle for women aged 40-42. According to NICE, a full cycle of IVF treatment should include one round of ovarian stimulation, followed by the transfer of any resultant fresh and frozen embryos.

2. Scotland offers the IVF Gold Standard: three full IVF cycles for clinically eligible women under the age of 40, plus one full IVF cycle for women aged between 40-42, and provision if either you or your husband has a child from a previous relationship. Wales provides two full IVF cycles for clinically eligible women under the age of 40, plus one full IVF cycle for women aged between 40-42, and allows access to treatment if either you or your husband has a child from a previous relationship. Northern Ireland provides just one partial IVF cycle for women under 40 and allows access to treatment if either you or your husband has a child from a previous relationship.

3. There is a move towards sustained disinvestment in NHS fertility services in England. Fertility Fairness' updated 2018 audit of England's 195 CCGs shows a marked reduction in access to NHS-funded IVF, with potential further cuts ahead. The vast majority of England's CCGs – 87.7 per cent – do not follow national guidance and do not offer 3 NHS-funded IVF cycles.

Since 2017, 39 CCGs (20.0 per cent) have slashed services (either cut the number of cycles they offer or introduced stricter access criteria) and 10 CCGs (5.1 per cent) are currently consulting on cutting or removing NHS fertility treatment.

4. Progress Educational Trust (PET) is a UK charity working to advance public understanding of, and engagement with, science, law and ethics in the fields of human genetics, human reproduction, embryology and stem cell research. Funded by grants and public donations, PET aims to improve the choices for people affected by infertility or genetic conditions.

<https://www.progress.org.uk/>

5. PET organises free-to-attend events debating the responsible application of reproductive and genetic science and publishes BioNews, a free comment and news service. Subscribe to BioNews at <https://www.bionews.org.uk/subscribe>