Dear Colleague

**Provision of Infertility Services in Scotland (updated IVF criteria)**

As you know a National Infertility Group was convened in April 2010, chaired by Ian Crichton, Chief Executive of NHS NSS Scotland. The Group produced a report in January 2013, with recommendations on various aspects of infertility, including updated IVF criteria for all eligible couples, for the consideration of Scottish Government Ministers.

Ministers have approved the Group’s recommendations, with some modifications. The main access criteria are set out at Annex A, with a link to the full report and modelling from the National Infertility Group at Annex B.

New access criteria will come into force on 1 July 2013. Criteria will be the same across the 4 units providing NHS IVF services in Scotland. Chief Executives of provider units must ensure that the eligibility criteria across all Boards are strictly adhered to, to ensure that all patients in Scotland access the same levels of treatment.

All new and all current patients must meet all criteria before accessing IVF treatment. New patients should not be referred to the 4 centres providing NHS IVF if they do not meet access criteria.

Patients who have already been referred for IVF, but who do not meet new criteria should be allowed to stay on a ‘holding list' for a period of not less than one year, to allow them to make the lifestyle changes that could enable them to access treatment. Support must be offered by patients’ local NHS Board to enable patients to make necessary lifestyle changes which should not only improve their chance of success but also ensure healthier outcomes for both patients and babies born as a result of IVF treatment.

All provider units were represented on the National Infertility Group, therefore, units are well aware of the change in criteria and have been working towards implementing the criteria from early in 2013.

**Review**

A short review will take place in early 2015 at the latest. This review will reflect on implementation of the access criteria changes from 1 July 2013 and emerging clinical evidence, before further criteria changes are considered.

**Funding and waiting times**

On 23 September 2012, the Minister for Public Health announced investment of £12 million over 3 years to help drive down waiting times for IVF across Scotland. Funding has been allocated to the 4 centres which

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provide NHS IVF, and which all NHS Boards use. Consequently, patients from across Scotland will benefit from this investment. Waiting times for patients in many NHS Boards have already reduced substantially as a result of the funding. There is an expectation that, to ensure patients continue to benefit from the increased investment, Boards must continue to provide funding at least at the same level as in 2012/13, and Boards should consider whether funding for IVF in their area needs to be increased. Further information will be required from NHS Boards on this issue over the course of 2013/14.

The Government will provide further information later this year to NHS Boards on IVF and the 12 month waiting time. Work will continue on waiting times data collection to support both the waiting time commitment and the HEAT target.

Multiple pregnancies
Ministers have accepted the recommendations of the Group, but further definitions of some of the eligibility criteria are necessary. In particular, due to the increase in IVF treatment, and the resulting pressure this can exert on neonatal units, it is very important that Chief Executives of provider Boards encourage the use of single embryo transfer on all patients with a good prognosis. This will increase the number of frozen embryo transfers couples are likely to have, but will reduce the multiple birth rate. The single biggest risk of fertility treatment is multiple pregnancy. It increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death and disability. It also increases the risk of dangerous complications to the mother, such as high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia.

On average, one in five IVF pregnancies are multiple compared to one in 80 for women who conceive naturally. More information can be found on this in the National Infertility Group’s report, and on the HFEA’s website. http://www.hfea.gov.uk/Multiple-births-after-IVF.html. Further information will be requested from the provider units on this issue over the course of 2013/14.

Age
Ministers have responded to the Group’s age recommendation by adding that for couples where the woman is aged from the day after her 40th birthday to 42, who meet all other criteria, one full cycle of IVF should be offered if:

- They have never previously had IVF treatment
- There is no evidence of poor ovarian reserve and if, in the treating clinician’s view it is in the patients’ interest
- There has been a discussion of the additional implications of IVF and pregnancy at this age.

Gametes
A short-life working group is being set up to examine a pan-Scotland solution for the provision, collection and storage of Gametes (donor egg and sperm). In the meantime, NHS Boards must ensure they meet the needs of eligible couples requiring this service.

Sustaining IVF in the NHS
It is vital that the 4 centres that provide NHS IVF share their capacity and make the best use of NHS facilities. Outwith an emergency situation, which must be discussed in advance with the Scottish Government, patients should be referred only to the 4 centres providing NHS IVF treatment.

Primary Care providers should take note of the new access criteria to inform their patients, including new Pathways of Care forms from primary to secondary care.

Finally, please ensure you carry out an Equality Impact Assessment on implementation of the new criteria in your area.

If you require any further information about this letter or any of the attachments, please contact Sarah Corcoran on 0131 244 2428.
Yours sincerely

DEREK FEELEY
Updated IVF/ICSI Access Criteria

Definition of infertility from 1 April 2013*
Infertility with an appropriate cause, of any duration – all couples
or
Unexplained infertility of 2 years – heterosexual couples
Unexplained infertility following six to eight cycles of donor insemination – same sex couples

Access criteria recommendations for all couples from 1 April 2013*
• Eligible patients may be offered up to two cycles of IVF/ICSI where there is a reasonable expectation of a live birth.
• Both partners must be non-smoking for at least 3 months before treatment and continue to be non-smoking during treatment.
• Both partners must abstain from illegal and abusive substances.
• Both partners must be Methadone free for at least one year prior to treatment.
• Neither partner should drink alcohol prior to or during the period of treatment.
• BMI of female partner must be above 18.5 and below 30.
• Neither partner to have undergone voluntary sterilisation, even if sterilisation reversal has been self-funded.
• NHS funding will not be provided to couples where either partner has already received the number of NHS funded IVF treatment cycles supported by NHSScotland regardless of where in the UK they received treatment.
• No individual (male or female) can access more than the number of NHS funded IVF treatment cycles supported by NHSScotland under any circumstances, even if they are in a new relationship.
• Fresh cycles of treatment must be initiated by the date of the female partner’s 40th birthday, and all subsequent frozen transfers must be complete before the woman’s 41st birthday.
• Couples must have been co-habiting in a stable relationship for a minimum of 2 years.
• NHS funding may be given to those patients who have previously paid for IVF treatment, if in the treating clinician’s view, the individual clinical circumstances warrant further treatment.
• Patients should not be placed at the end of the waiting list following an unsuccessful treatment cycle.
– Normally, there would be a gap of 6 to 11 months between cycles of IVF, for patients who remain eligible.

Extracted from the National Infertility Group Report, 2013

*New criteria will come into force on 1 July 2013
ANNEX B

A link to the National Infertility Group Report, 2013, and modelling is below.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/infertility

The Group’s report is also attached as a PDF for ease.

468074_v20_20130507.pdf

Child and Maternal Health Division
Directorate for Children and Families
Scottish Government