

Welfare of the Child – Patient Information

Background

During your first appointment at the Regional Fertility Centre (RFC), the Dr will ask you a number of questions about your medical history. The Dr will also ask you questions relating to your home life by asking you to complete a form (FM8). These questions are part of an assessment known as the welfare of the child assessment (WOC). Fertility centres are legally required to complete this assessment in order to know whether any child born following fertility treatment is likely to face serious medical, physical or psychological harm. You will then be asked to fill in the WOC form.

Once complete, during your consultation, the Dr will check your answers and counter sign the form.

The following information will help you complete the WOC form.

Why is it necessary to complete a WOC form?

Fertility centres offering treatments including 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.

What are the criteria for making the assessment?

The HFEA's guidelines mean that the centre can 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, in a very small number of cases, where there are serious concerns about a prospective child's welfare, treatment may not be provided. The RFC may have to investigate if the Dr is 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 proceed with treatment.

What information is the clinic looking for?

The Dr will ask you questions relating to the following:

- 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 RFC 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 RFC 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 RFC 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 RFC contacting my GP or other professional?

You don't have to give your permission, but the RFC 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 centre
- 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 RFC 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 centre. 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.