Patient Support Policy

1.0 Introduction / Purpose

The Regional Fertility Centre (RFC) recognises that fertility investigation, treatment, donation and treatment outcomes can have emotional and psychosocial impacts on patients, donors and their partners.

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the RFC provides appropriate, accessible and patient-centred support before, during and after treatment or donation and how all staff contribute to supporting patients throughout their fertility journey.

This policy supports the RFC in meeting relevant HFEA requirements and guidance relating to counselling and patient support.

1.1 Background

The HFEA Code of Practice includes specific guidance on counselling and patient support. The RFC recognises that high-quality fertility care includes consideration of patients' emotional and psychosocial needs alongside their clinical care.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all RFC staff involved in the care, treatment or support of patients and donors. The RFC is committed to ensuring that patients, donors and their partners, where applicable, are treated with dignity and compassion and have access to appropriate emotional and psychosocial support throughout their fertility journey. Patients, their partners and donors will be treated in accordance with the Belfast Health and Social Care values: working together, excellence, openness, honesty and compassion.

3.0 Principles of Patient Support

- **Patient-centred**: responsive to individual needs and circumstances.
- **Accessible**: reasonable steps are taken to ensure patients can access information and support.
- **Compassionate**: patients are treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect.
- **Inclusive**: individual communication and support needs are recognised.
- **Proactive**: opportunities to identify support needs should occur throughout the patient journey.
- **Responsive**: staff recognise concerns and know how to direct or escalate patients for additional support.
- **Confidential**: information is handled appropriately and in accordance with relevant confidentiality and information governance requirements.

3.1 Roles & Responsibilities

All RFC staff have a responsibility to contribute to a supportive patient experience within the boundaries of their role and competence.

Staff should:

- communicate sensitively, respectfully and clearly;
- listen to patients and provide opportunities for them to ask questions;
- be alert to indications that a patient or donor may require additional emotional or practical support;
- respond appropriately to concerns raised by patients, donors or partners;
- provide information about available support services where appropriate;
- signpost or refer to specialist support, including counselling, in accordance with RFC procedures;
- recognise the limits of their own role and seek advice or escalate concerns where appropriate; and
- maintain confidentiality and document relevant information appropriately.

3.2 Patient–Centred Care

This includes listening to, informing and involving patients in their care. This will mean providing care that is respectful of, and responsive to, individual patient preferences, needs and values, and ensuring that patient values guide all clinical decisions. This will be achieved through good communication between staff and patients with an ongoing commitment to patients being at the heart of their treatment and care.

The RFC together with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will deliver patient-centred care through the following values:

- Working together
- Excellence
- Openness and Honesty
- Compassion

Working together
We work together for the best outcome for people we care for and support. We work across Health and Social Care and with other external organisations and agencies, recognising that leadership is the responsibility of all.

Excellence
We commit to being the best we can be in our work, aiming to improve and develop services to achieve positive changes. We deliver safe, high quality, compassionate care and support.

Openness and Honesty
We are open and honest with each other and act with integrity and candour.

Compassion
We are sensitive, caring, respectful and understanding towards those we care for and support our colleagues. We listen carefully to others to better understand and take action to help them and ourselves.

3.3 Accessibility & Individual Support Needs

Support needs should be identified as early as possible and reviewed throughout the patient's pathway where circumstances change.

The RFC aims to ensure its services are accessible to all patients across the outpatient centre at the Grove Wellbeing Centre and the Royal Hospital treatment centre.

If a patient requires any adjustments for reasons related to disability to allow them to attend their appointment or if they have any difficulties comprehending and completing written and online forms, the RFC can provide additional support. This can be in the form of the interpreting service for service users with English not being their first language, sign language interpreting, the Sighted Guide Service, face to face appointments and longer appointment times. Patients are asked to let us know of any additional support requirements at their first appointment, which will then be acted upon by the team to ensure their needs are met.

3.4 Support Throughout the Patient Journey

All staff have a role in providing compassionate and supportive care. However, general patient support is distinct from specialist counselling. Staff should not undertake specialist counselling beyond the boundaries of their role, training and competence and should signpost or refer to the appropriate specialist service where required.

Where a patient, donor or partner may benefit from specialist counselling, staff should provide information about the counselling service and facilitate access in accordance with the appropriate RFC pathway.

Patients, donors and partners may have different support needs at different stages. Staff should remain mindful of support needs during:

- investigation and preparation for treatment;
- decision-making and consent;
- treatment and procedures;
- donation-related pathways;
- waiting periods and treatment uncertainty;
- treatment outcomes;
- unsuccessful treatment or discontinuation of treatment; and
- transition from or discharge from the RFC.

3.5 Counselling & Specialist Support

The RFC provides patients with access to a specialist fertility counselling service. Counselling provides an opportunity for patients, donors and partners, where applicable, to discuss the emotional and psychosocial implications of fertility treatment and related decisions.

Information on how to access the counselling service should be made available to patients at appropriate points throughout their pathway.

The RFC works with the Family Routes in supporting the development of patient support and relevant staff training.

To make further enquiries about Family Routes or to make an appointment, simply telephone **028 9073 6080** or email info@familyroutes.co.uk

Most appointments take place at their premises:
Ground Floor
2 Pilot's View
Heron Road
Belfast
BT3 9LE

3.6 Communication & Patient Information

Excellent communication is key to all our activities. The RFC expects all staff to communicate with patients / partners / donors in a clear and concise way, aiming to use language which can easily be understood. All staff should introduce themselves when speaking directly or over the phone with patients, in a polite and friendly manner. Staff should be clear when explaining information to patients and direct patients to online resources where appropriate.

3.6.1 Written & Online Information

The RFC has a comprehensive website containing information on all treatments available through the RFC with helpful links as appropriate. The website is reviewed and updated on a frequent basis or whenever information changes.

3.7 Implementation of Policy & Dissemination

This policy is available to all staff via Q-Pulse and to all patients via our website.

This policy is relevant to all staff within the following teams: Quality, Administration, Nursing, Embryology, Andrology and Consultants and Management.

3.7.1 Training & Staff Awareness

Training will be provided to all staff, firstly at induction and then on an ongoing basis. Training will be provided by Heads of Discipline or designated staff within the RFC and by Family Routes.

3.8 Monitoring, Feedback and Continual Improvement

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through relevant sources of evidence, which may include:

- patient experience and satisfaction survey findings;

- complaints, compliments and other patient feedback;
- themes relating to accessibility and communication;
- feedback from counselling and patient-support arrangements, where appropriate and available;
- staff training completion;
- relevant incidents and non-conformities;
- audit findings.

Findings and trends should be reviewed to identify opportunities for improvement and, where required, appropriate actions should be developed and monitored.

3.8.1 Care Opinion

Care Opinion is a safe, anonymous and independent website where service users, carers and relatives can leave their feedback or "story" about Health and Social Care services. Care Opinion allow services such as the RFC to gather patient feedback and respond to it. Feedback can be shared with staff/teams to identify and celebrate what we are doing right. It can also be used to improve the service and inform future quality improvement projects.

To contact Care Opinion: search **careopinion.org.uk** or call **0800 122 3135** Monday – Friday 9am-5pm.

3.8.2 Complaints

As mentioned above, the RFC welcomes feedback about patients' experiences, including compliments, concerns and complaints.

For compliments email compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net

We use every opportunity for improvement and appropriate actions will be developed and learning shared with relevant teams.

If you do have reason to complain, please do so through the BHSCT process as follows:

1. By letter:
   Complaints Department
   Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
   7th Floor, McKinney House
   Musgrave Park Hospital
   Stockman's Lane
   Belfast
   BT9 7JB

By email complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net, by online form: Complete our online form or by telephone on 028 9504 8000 (10am to 12pm & 2pm to 4pm) Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays.

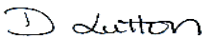
SIGNATORIES

(Policy – Guidance should be signed off by the author of the policy and the Person Responsible).



Date: 23/10/2026

Author (Quality Manager), Mrs Louisa Taylor



Date: 23/10/2026

Person Responsible, Dr Deborah Lutton