



Introduction

Researching and applying for NHS funded fertility treatment is complicated because every area has different availability and criteria. This infosheet offers guidance on how to get accurate information.

What is a Primary Care Trust (PCT)?

Each area in England has a PCT, the organisation responsible for allocating funding for all healthcare, including fertility treatment, on behalf of the GP practices in that area. In Wales, the Health Commission Wales has this responsibility.

How to access funding

For information on the availability and criteria for funding for fertility treatment, and on how to make an application, a woman should contact:

- her GP, for the name of the commissioning manager at her Primary Care Trust (PCT)
- or, Linda Tanner, MFS NHS contracts manager, 10.00am-3.30pm, Wednesday to Friday on 01922 455911, or via linda.tanner@midlandfertility.com

Be prepared to ask:

- if the PCT has a contract with MFS?
- what is the length of any waiting list?
- what are the criteria for eligibility?
- what is the route for referral?
- how many cycles are offered to each patient?
- what is the duration between each funded cycle?
- what types of treatment can be funded?

Criteria for funding

All PCTs manage the list of patients who require fertility treatment in varying ways and each has different criteria for selecting patients for treatment, including:

- age of female patient
- length of relationship
- previous sterilisation
- duration of infertility
- existing children
- previous treatment
- BMI (see below)

BMI

Body Mass Index (BMI) indicates a person's height/weight ratio. A BMI of 22-24 is considered 'normal'. Evidence shows that any woman with a BMI of less than 19 or more than 30 has a reduced chance of conceiving and an increased risk of miscarriage. PCTs do not usually accept a patient onto the waiting list if her BMI is under 19 or over 30. The patient would have to reach a target weight before joining any such PCT waiting list. MFS or the PCT commissioning department can advise a patient of the specific criteria for her PCT.

How long is the wait for funding?

The length of time varies for each PCT list. Some PCTs will allow treatment immediately, but others may have a waiting list.

Is funded treatment available at MFS?

Linda Tanner at MFS, or each PCT, can advise whether a woman should contact either her GP or consultant to get a referral to MFS. Her GP/consultant will assess her situation and:

- either advise her that she is not eligible for PCT funding
- or add her name to the waiting list that they control
- or refer her directly to MFS

When will MFS contact funded patients?

Once MFS has received a patient's details from her GP or consultant, she will receive a letter including a pre-treatment questionnaire, which the patient needs to complete and return to MFS. MFS will confirm if the details match the PCT criteria and invite the patient to contact MFS to arrange a first appointment.

What happens at the first appointments?

At the first appointment one of the clinical team will:

- take blood samples for baseline tests:
 - from both partners for screening for infectious diseases, including HIV and Hepatitis B and C
 - from the female partner for hormone tests
- arrange for a sperm sample for analysis from the male partner
- do a vaginal ultrasound scan of the woman

A couple of weeks later, at the follow-up appointment one of the clinical team will:

- take a full medical history
- discuss lifestyle issues that can affect fertility
- take details of the patient's present family circumstances

After the first appointment and follow-up appointment, MFS will be able to recommend the best treatment for the patient and relevant funding will be confirmed.

Managing the PCT treatments

MFS manages the treatment for each PCT according to each PCT's requirements, generally via two routes:

- MFS receives a patient referral, funding is available for treatment and there is no waiting list
- or, MFS receives a patient referral, checks that the patient meets the criteria for her PCT, applies to the PCT for the funding on her behalf, waits for funding, then notifies the patient when the funding becomes available

Once advised that funding is available, patients are asked not to defer treatment for non-emergency reasons such as holidays, changing jobs or promotions at work.

Self-funding while on a PCT waiting list

Any patient considering self-funding her fertility treatment while she is waiting for PCT funding to become available, should contact Linda Tanner at MFS, as it could affect her eligibility. If any self-funded treatment results in a live birth, PCT funding will no longer be available to that couple.

What if funding is not available?

If a woman is told she is not eligible for funded treatment and feels that she should be, some PCTs will allow an appeal in writing. Contact Linda Tanner for details of the PCTs which have an appeal process.

Stay in touch

Patients seeking funded treatment or whose funding has already been confirmed should stay in touch with Linda Tanner and advise her of any information which could affect their eligibility for funding, including:

- change of address
- change of telephone number
- change of GP
- change of partner or to her living arrangements
- if she has a baby

What is included in the cost?

MFS will advise the patient in the treatment confirmation letter of exactly what is included in the treatment unit.

Costs

The patient will be advised of any service or procedure that is required before treatment may start or progress and whether it incurs a cost which is not included in the NHS funding.

Where additional costs are incurred as a consequence of a non-clinical variation or delay in treatment it is likely that the NHS funding will not include these additional costs.

Further information

Please visit midlandfertility.com and search for 'Treatments' or read the following MFS infosheets:

- Treatment Assessment (Baseline Tests)
 - IUI
 - IVF
 - ICSI
 - others as required
- (downloadable from midlandfertility.com by searching for 'MFS Treatment Literature', or in hardcopy format from MFS).