Coronavirus (COVID-19) update – last reviewed Wednesday 8th April 2020

The recent weeks have seen a series of unfolding events that have had an enormous impact on all of our lives. Even more so for those patients either having fertility treatment or planning fertility treatment during this time. We know that many of our patients are feeling worried about what this public health emergency means for their treatment. Our patients are at the heart of what we do and your health and wellbeing are of paramount importance to us. We therefore wanted to put together some information to explain the steps we are taking, why we are taking them and hopefully reassure you and answer any questions you may have.

We have been closely monitoring the information released by the UK government for the general public but also that released by relevant professional bodies for the fertility sector. On the 18th of March 2020, The British Fertility Society (BFS) and Association of Reproductive and Clinical Scientists (ARCS) released guidance asking fertility clinics to stop seeing patients in order to slow the spread of coronavirus and also to help the NHS deal with current demand.

International bodies such as the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) have released guidance to the same end.

Our regulatory body, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) issued a statement to say they expect clinics to follow the guidance from the BFS and ARCS. That guidance is as follows:

- Clinics are not to start any new cycles of fertility treatment including ovulation induction, IUI, IVF/ICSI, frozen embryo replacement and surgical sperm retrieval
- Patients in the stimulation phase of treatment that have not yet had their trigger, should be advised to cancel their cycle
- Patients in treatment that have had their trigger may go ahead with oocyte retrieval (as long as patients remain well and the clinic has resources to do this safely) but patients are advised to have their embryos cryopreserved (frozen)
- HFEA states that all treatment services should be finished by 15th April 2020
- Non-elective fertility preservation may continue where appropriate (egg/sperm/embryo storage for cancer patients)

All affected patients are being contacted directly by members of our teams with further information. Please click here for an open letter to all fertility patients from the Chair of the HFEA dated 23rd March 2020.

In response to guidance form our professional bodies and our regulator, here at Cambridge IVF we have implemented our detailed management plan which includes the following points:

**Patients**

- With regret, we will not be starting any new fertility treatments at the present time
• Patients currently within a treatment cycle (having had their trigger) will be advised to undertake embryo cryopreservation (freezing) with no further oocyte collections after 30/03/2020
• Diagnostic semen analysis services are suspended
• Every effort will be made to continue non-elective fertility preservation for certain patients that are, or are likely to become prematurely infertile (e.g. cancer patients)
• Our sperm, egg and embryo cryo-storage facilities will be protected and continue to function normally. Frozen samples will be looked after in the usual way
• To adhere to social distancing requirements, Consultations will be held by telephone or Skype
• Our Patient Information sessions will take place via Skype also. To discuss booking a Consultation or Information Session please call on 01223 349010
• Patients that have had treatment suspended will be treated with priority when activities return to normal

Please remember this is not a total ban on treatment, instead we are winding down our treatment services and suspending activity with a view to re-starting once it is safe to do so. We have a duty to support our NHS colleagues and prevent further spread of the virus.

Staff
• Emphasis on more regular hand washing with posters in relation to correct hand washing technique posted above each sink
• Increase in the availability of hand sanitiser for members of staff
• Staff with symptoms (or someone in their household with symptoms) to immediately self-isolate
• Increase in cleaning and disinfecting of all areas with particular attention to high-frequency touch points
• Staff that are on site will adhere to social distancing requirements
• Some appropriately skilled staff members may be re-deployed to Addenbrookes Hospital to assist in the critical NHS activities against the pandemic

Our plan will be frequently reviewed in line with any new evidence and may change. We will do our best to keep you all updated as quickly as possible. Please be assured that we will also be working hard to plan how and when to resume normal activities when it is safe to do so.

Pregnancy

On 16th March 2020 the Chief Medical Officer placed pregnant women in a ‘vulnerable group’. We understand that this must be distressing to hear for those that are pregnant or hoping to be. Please remember that this was a cautionary measure due to this being such a new virus. Treatment for severely infected COVID-19 patients could potentially require the use of drugs that are not
recommended in pregnancy which may have been another driving force for this government decision. Thankfully, the evidence so far shows that pregnant women are no more likely to contract COVID-19 than the general population. What the medical profession has known for a very long time is that, for some women, pregnancy can alter how your body responds to viral infection. This could mean that symptoms of a virus may be more severe but generally, pregnant women contracting COVID-19 do not seem to be more seriously unwell than other healthy adults. There is currently no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be passed from mother to baby during pregnancy or that it is associated with an increased risk of pregnancy loss.

The above (and further information) can be found in ‘Information for pregnant women and their families’ published by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and updated on the 28th March 2020.

Please do remember that we are here for you during this incredibly difficult time. Staff are still on hand to answer any questions you still have and we don’t want you to worry in silence.

Useful links:

1. NHS Advice for Everyone on Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Updated 1st April 2020  
   https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/
2. GOV.UK Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK – Updated 30th March 2020  
   https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-
   for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-
   older-people-and-vulnerable-adults
3. Advice for pregnancy from the RCOG-  https://www.rcog.org.uk/
4. HFEA - https://www.hfea.gov.uk/
5. BFS - https://www.britishfertilitysociety.org.uk/
6. ARCS - https://www.arcscientists.org/

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