

NEL CCG development of a single fertility policy

Proposed plans to involve stakeholders, clinicians, public and patients in creating a NEL-wide policy for NHS funded fertility treatment.

February 2022

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1. Overview

North East London CCG is undertaking a clinical review of the existing five individual fertility policies that were held by the individual CCGs before we came together as a single organisation in April 2021, with the intention of creating a single policy for NEL CCG.

As we are now a single CCG we believe it is important to have equitable access for north east London patients seeking fertility treatment. In addition to ensuring we have an equitable and consistent approach to access, clinical practice and research in this field has continued to evolve, along with changing views and attitudes in society. Reviewing our existing policies against this and latest national guidance will enable us to propose a single, more inclusive policy that reflects the most up to date views on eligibility recognising the variety of fertility situations and needs.

We will be involving clinicians, stakeholders, patients and the public in shaping the proposed policy. We plan to undertake a 10 week engagement period in Summer 2022 where we will promote our draft policy and invite feedback and views through events, focused meetings and a written survey. This feedback will be considered by our clinical review panel and inform the final policy for decision in Autumn.

2. Current policies

North East London CCG has inherited five fertility policies from its predecessor CCGs. There are a number of differences between the policies including variation in the age thresholds and numbers of cycles funded, and they have not been reviewed or updated recently. This is resulting in inequality in health provision and outcomes.

City and Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest each has a policy last reviewed in 2014/2015. Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge have one single policy which was reviewed in 2017 as part of the CCG's Spending Money Wisely Review, which followed a 12 week public engagement period, and clinical review; this saw the number of IVF cycles for eligible patients reduce from three to one.

In September 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting impact on NHS services, all north east London CCGs agreed to temporarily uplift the fertility treatment eligibility age

threshold by one year to ensure women were not disadvantaged by the suspension of services and the delays in accessing treatment.

3. Policy review and decision making

We have reviewed our five existing policies to identify where they are consistent with current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) clinical guidance on fertility issues, other relevant national guidance, and other London, Kent and Medway CCG policies, and where they differ. Equality and equity of the policies was also reviewed.

Areas being considered in the review:

- Number of IVF cycles and embryo transfers
- Age limit for fertility treatment
- Funding of intrauterine insemination (IUI) also known as artificial insemination for certain patient groups
- Funding of donor eggs/sperm based on certain criteria
- Fertility preservation – how long eggs/sperm/embryos are stored and age criteria
- Funding of surrogates for those with certain medical conditions
- Ovarian reserve criteria.

We have used this review to identify suggested options for an updated and consistent single policy for NEL. These options will be reviewed by our fertility clinical review panel. This panel consists of GPs, clinical specialists, public health specialists, providers and commissioners, who are considering the options' impact on outcome, cost and service capacity.

The clinical review panel will make recommendations to a separate Commissioning Steering Group which will put forward a draft policy based on the panel's recommendations, feedback from a pre-engagement exercise (detailed in section 4 below) and the affordability of the recommendations in the context of all the demands on NEL CCG's budgets.

A full Equality and Quality Impact Assessment will be completed on the proposals prior to engagement and this will be updated following any changes made as a result of the engagement exercise.

The final policy will be agreed at the NEL Integrated Care Board in Autumn 2022.

4. Engagement plans

Between January and March 2022 we will be meeting with key groups to share our plans on creating a single fertility policy, to gain insight and views on our existing policies and areas of the policy under consideration. This includes sharing our plans here with the JOSCs, with Healthwatch and NEL CCG staff network and other local groups that represent protected characteristic groups.

Feedback from our pre-engagement so far has included; consideration to be given to the language of the policy to ensure it is simple and easy for people to understand; to consider national charity views on access to treatment for LGBTQ+ communities; and offers of support to put us in touch with local community groups to share the draft policy with as part of our planned wider engagement.

In the summer we will undertake 10 weeks of engagement with the public, patients, clinicians and stakeholders to share our draft single policy and seek feedback. We will provide people with a range of opportunities to have their say. This will include a mix of online/ digital and face-to-face methods, and ensure all materials and messages are

accessible to our population, regardless of language, literacy and digital barriers. We intend to host engagement events (at least one in each borough), as well as going out to key patient and interest groups to gain their input.

We will also present our policy to the JOSCs in June for your insight and feedback.

5. Next steps

We will continue with the development of the draft proposed policy as described in the previous sections.

We will write to the NEL local authorities in late May to share our detailed engagement plans and share our draft engagement materials, along with our intended engagement launch date which we expect to be towards the end of May 2022.