

## **Note of NHS ACU Leads Teams Meeting Tuesday 15 February 2022**

### **Present:**

{REDACTED} (co-chair) and {REDACTED} – Aberdeen

{REDACTED}, {REDACTED} and {REDACTED} – Edinburgh

{REDACTED} and {REDACTED} – Glasgow

{REDACTED} – Fertility Network

{REDACTED} (co-chair), {REDACTED} and {REDACTED} – Scottish Government

{REDACTED} and {REDACTED} – NHS National Services Scotland

### **Apologies:**

{REDACTED}, {REDACTED}, {REDACTED}, {REDACTED} and {REDACTED}

### **Summary of topics discussed with action points highlighted in red.**

#### **Deferral of fertility treatment for unvaccinated women - review**

The deferral of fertility treatment for unvaccinated patients was recommended and confirmed by the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 7 January 2022.

A short summary of the current position was provided:

- In order for the group to provide a recommendation on the review of the deferral of fertility treatment for unvaccinated patients an evidence paper/review document had been developed.
  - Thanks were given to all those members of the group who had made contributions to the paper.
  - The group will discuss the paper and evidence and hope to provide a majority recommendation at the end of the meeting. This would be added to the paper.
  - Following this the paper with the recommendation added will go on to be considered by National Infertility Group, senior advisers, medical advisers, Ministers and the Chief Medical Officer.
  - The ongoing review of the evidence needs to continue to look at the originally presented evidence in the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 7 January 2022 and assess the current position and consider which of the two options the group wishes to recommend:
- I. Withdraw the recommendation to temporarily defer fertility treatment for unvaccinated patients.
    - Continue to promote vaccination prior to fertility treatment due to the substantial evidence for the safety of vaccines in those planning pregnancy, undergoing fertility treatment and the pregnant population with respect to maternal and perinatal outcomes, including evidence for continued vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic COVID-19 disease.

- Patients will continue to be advised at the start of the fertility pathway and at every opportunity (making every contact count) about the risks of non-vaccination and benefits of vaccination.
  - Those who, despite explanation of all risks/benefits, choose not to get vaccinated should be asked by Fertility Centres to sign an informed consent form acknowledging that they are aware of the risks prior to treatment, similar to other aspects of the fertility pathway.
- II. Recommend a further temporary period of deferral of fertility treatment for all patients who are not vaccinated against COVID-19, with a further review starting during March 2022.

Various views were discussed:

- The evidence on morbidity and risk of severe illness among unvaccinated pregnant women has not really altered and data specifically on pregnant women is very limited.
- The available data on unvaccinated individuals suggests that the risk of severe disease requiring hospital or critical care admission has reduced over the last four to six weeks.
- The latest PHS data demonstrates a reduction in both COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations, following an initially steep rise in cases, and a less pronounced increase in hospitalisations, associated with the emergence of Omicron as the dominant variant.
- View expressed that at this time we do not have the evidence to reverse the deferral of treatment for unvaccinated patients but a consent form for patients should be worked on so that it is ready when this can be lifted.
- Should deferral be considered for higher risk patients only and not just keep a blanket deferral in place.
- Although case numbers have fluctuated this is not the same for hospital or ICU admissions which have remained stable.
- Fertility Network UK representative advised that it was still important to focus on patient safety and continue to do what is best for mother and baby. Fertility Network UK were grateful for all the support given to patients but we need to keep them informed.
- Consideration should also be given at this time as to how the NHS would proceed should there be other variants of concern in the future.
- There is no clear majority with some members clear that they would support the recommencement of treatment of unvaccinated patients whilst others just do not feel that we have sufficient evidence at this time to remove the deferral.

Next steps

- At this time it is clear that there is not a majority recommendation of the group with different views on whether the deferral should be kept in effect.
- There was no representation from Dundee Assisted Conception Unit and it was important that they contribute their views towards the recommendation from the group.

- Scottish Government will make some small changes to the evidence paper following discussions here today and we will then circulate to all four NHS IVF Assisted Conception Units asking which option their unit supports.
- The paper can be shared with those in governance needed to come to a position of support within each unit.
- The recommendations and options will then be considered as discussed above and there will be a recommendation made by CMO by way of a letter to NHS Boards.

**ACTION** – The evidence and option paper to be updated and circulated to the four NHS Assisted Conception Units asking which option their unit supports.

**ACTION** – Following the above action the recommendation on the deferral will be taken to the National Infertility Group meeting on 24 February and then, senior advisers, medical advisers, Ministers and the Chief Medical Officer.

**Next meeting**

The next meeting of the group will be confirmed.

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