

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM COUNSELLING?

You can come and talk about anything that is troubling you while you are planning, undergoing, or have had fertility treatment at the Edinburgh Fertility Centre (EFC). The service offers emotional support during what can be a stressful time. Problems with relationships, fear of treatment and treatment outcome, and pain of loss and grief are some of the issues people bring. Often it is helpful to simply talk through the treatment and look at options for the future with support and understanding. The aim of counselling is to encourage people to find their own solutions in a safe and supportive space – it is not always about giving advice.

If you are considering storing sperm, eggs or embryos for later use or treatment using donor sperm, eggs or embryos you will be asked to attend counselling to discuss the implications of this treatment, so that you are helped to make a fully informed decision. This special kind of counselling is called “implications counselling.”

All counsellors in the service are members of the British Infertility Counselling Association (www.bica.net) and abide by their ethical framework.

WHEN CAN I SEE THE COUNSELLOR?

The counsellors within the EFC department are Jocelyn Proctor, Fiona Cook, Barbara Balazs and Catryn Davies. Counselling appointments are available in the unit on Monday to Friday, between the hours of 8.45am and 3.00pm.

HOW LONG IS EACH APPOINTMENT?

An appointment usually lasts one hour.

HOW DO I MAKE AN APPOINTMENT?

You can refer yourself for counselling by asking any of the nurses or doctors to arrange an appointment for you. This can be done during a clinical appointment or by telephoning the nurses’ station on: **0131 242 2450/49**. On some occasions your nurse or doctor may ask you to see the counsellor and will write a referral note giving a brief outline of the reason for counselling. If you are unsure why you have been referred you can discuss this with your doctor or with the counsellor.

HOW OFTEN CAN I BE SEEN?

The counselling is not “long term” in nature, but it is available before, during and after treatment. The number of sessions will be decided between patient and counsellor, and if necessary the counsellor will help you to find support or further counselling outside of the unit.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

The counsellor writes brief notes following each session. These notes are for the counsellor’s use only, to record what is happening in the counselling. They are confidential and are kept in a secure filing cabinet, or a locked electronic file, which only the counsellors can access. They are kept separately from your clinical or “patient” file. They are destroyed after a number of years agreed with the unit and in accordance with BICA guidelines.

Please also see NHS Lothian Data Protection Policy and guidance, which has embedded within it The General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 which describes what information is stored, how and why.

Counselling sessions are confidential and specific details of your discussion with the counsellor will not be passed to the other members of the team. The counsellor just records in your file that you have attended for support. However, the types of occasions outlined below require the counsellor to report back to the team. The counsellor should always outline to you what will be contained in this report and you have full access to it as part of your patient file.

If you have attended for “implications counselling” (relating to treatment with surrogacy, donor sperm/eggs/embryos), the counsellor is required to write a report confirming relevant points have been discussed.

An important aspect of fertility counselling is the role of the counsellor under “Welfare of the Child”. This means that there are times when a member of the team has concerns for your wellbeing and requests a report back from the counsellor. At other times the counsellor may think it is important to pass on relevant information. In this case, the counsellor will make every attempt to discuss this with you, and outline to you what they need to share. Counsellors’ reports such as these are filed in your clinical file.

DO I COME ALONE OR WITH MY PARTNER?

This will depend very much on the issues people bring and what you want. If you are trying to reach a decision or are concerned about how treatment might affect your relationship, it can be useful to come as a couple. If you are struggling with your own feelings, you may prefer to come alone. There may be times when you are asked to both attend, such as if you have been asked to attend counseling as part of an assessment or to discuss implications of certain treatment.

WHAT IF I CAN’T KEEP AN APPOINTMENT?

It is important that you let us know if you cannot keep an arranged appointment with the counsellor. Please give as much notice as possible - preferably a week- if you cannot attend. You can do this by telephoning the unit on the contact number at the bottom of this information sheet. Patients who do not attend and fail to inform us will have their nonattendance documented in their records. If you cancel at short notice it is unlikely we can fill the counselling slot.

IF I DECIDE TO HAVE TREATMENT AT ANOTHER CENTRE, CAN I CONTINUE TO SEE THE COUNSELLOR?

Our counselling service is only funded for patients of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. Should you choose to attend another Fertility Centre, either in the United Kingdom or in another country, at a suitable juncture of the counselling we will support you in seeking counseling elsewhere.

IF I ALREADY HAVE A CHILD CAN I BRING HIM/HER TO MY COUNSELLING APPOINTMENT?

Making full use of a counselling session is not always easy with a child being present; therefore it will be important for you to arrange childcare for the duration of your one hour counselling appointment.

PATIENT FEEDBACK

We would appreciate it if you could take a few moments to tell us what you think about our fertility counselling service. You can complete the feedback form at any stage during your counselling online or fill out a paper copy at reception.

References:

BICA Guidelines for Good Practice in Fertility Counselling fourth Edition 2019