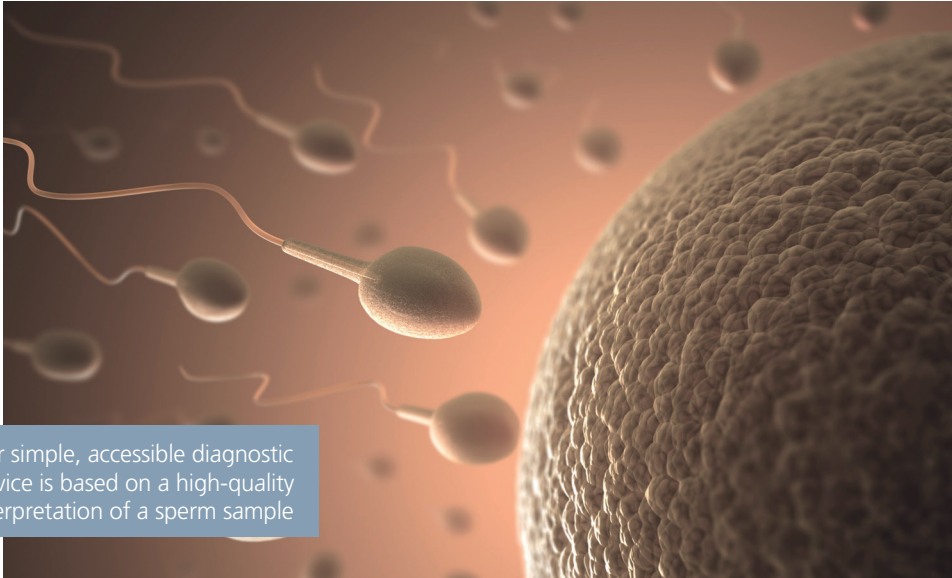


Fertility Solutions



Our simple, accessible diagnostic service is based on a high-quality interpretation of a sperm sample

Infertility affects 10% of couples in the UK, and 10–15% of couples in North America. Traditional treatment focuses on the female partner; we believe that equal attention should be given to investigating and treating the man. Such treatment can be easily accessible and inexpensive, and is often effective.

Current UK practice provides referral to fertility centres, where methods of artificial reproductive technology (ART) are universally applied. Generally, in vitro fertilisation (IVF), with or without other advanced technologies, such as intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), will be offered (IVF using the ICSI technique is typically used when men have a low or even very low sperm count).

Availability of IVF treatments varies by region, but the trigger for couples to be referred relates to a period of involuntary infertility. In some regions it is taken into account whether or not the couple has any surviving children by different partners, and the age of the female partner at the time when she is seeking treatment often influences whether or not IVF will be available to her. Often the body mass index (BMI) of the female partner is also taken into account when assessing suitability for treatment, but generally speaking the male partner's situation is far less relevant.

Although the cause of the infertile state may relate to the male partner in 30–50% of cases, the clinical state of the man does not trigger the referral. For this reason, it is rare for the man to be treated in his own right. Generally, the couple is offered a solution to their problem – that is IVF, and this 'solution' is presented as a treatment for male infertility. Sadly, it is often the case that the man is told that no treatment is possible, and, worse, further to justify this major intervention, that the couple will never achieve pregnancy by any other method. The inadvertent effects of the universal



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ABOUT FERTILITY SOLUTIONS

- » Based at Spire Thames Valley Hospital
- » Provides a simple diagnostic service to evaluate male fertility
- » Accessible service, with appointments available outside of work hours and at weekends
- » Semen analysis performed by experienced embryologists from fertility backgrounds
- » All reports are reviewed by Consultant Urologist Mr Jonathan Ramsay MS FRCS(Urol)

“Fertility Solutions aims to provide an accessible, inexpensive service for men, before a relatively inaccessible and expensive intervention becomes necessary”

» CASE HISTORY

A young couple, both in their mid-twenties, had failed to conceive over a two-year period. They lived in an area that did not fund IVF treatments until the female partner reached 34 years of age. They sought advice from a reputable IVF clinic. The sperm count showed very few sperm, and IVF using the ICSI technique was advised. The couple was very surprised, and sought the advice of Fertility Solutions.

Simple enquiry revealed that the man used a gym regularly, where he had taken the supplements offered as part of his fitness programme (which he believed were proteins only) for the past two years. The supplements in fact contained low levels of testosterone-like substances, and within three months of stopping these, the couple conceived easily and naturally.

use of IVF tends to isolate affected men, threatens their masculinity and often leaves them frustrated and angry, because there seems to be little interest in their own clinical situation. When couples are told that there is little or no chance of a natural conception, they concentrate on the treatment offered, and sometimes cease any attempt at natural conception.

sample. Men require a straightforward explanation of the process, and both a written and verbal explanation of the results. Because the investigation and the treatment of men is uncommon, many primary-care practitioners find it difficult to interpret semen analysis results – it is far better for this to be done by the scientist who reported on the results.

A new approach

Fertility Solutions operates in East Berkshire, based at Spire Thames Valley Hospital, and provides a simple accessible diagnostic service, based on a high-quality interpretation of a sperm

The benefits

It may be difficult to appreciate just how effective such a simple intervention can be. It is well known that lifestyle factors have a major role in human fertility, and there is increasing evidence that other significant medical conditions are linked to lowered levels of testosterone, which are often a feature of male subfertility. The andrologist (a specialist in male fertility) is, therefore, well placed to advise the man about:

- » smoking
- » obesity
- » use of recreational and class-A drugs
- » the need to exclude sexually transmitted diseases
- » reducing intake of caffeine and other ‘supplements’.

In our experience, careful adherence to lifestyle changes can be effective in 10% of men, and further investigation reveals treatable causes of infertility in a further 15%.

Lifestyle factors have a major role in fertility, and the andrologist is well placed to advise men about these



The process

Fertility Solutions aims to be accessible: a telephone call to make a convenient appointment, either before or after work or at weekends, is the most appropriate and cost-effective means of contact. Results and the possible implication of those results, including a discussion about lifestyle changes, is included as part of the semen-analysis service.

Vital to a complete pathway is the ability to send a report to the client's primary care practitioner, allowing onward referral to specialists in secondary care, who may be able to investigate the situation further.

The costs

To provide the diagnostic service, with interpretation and individual advice, costs £120, and this service alone may save many cycles of IVF, either because a natural conception occurs prior to the need for IVF, or because the first IVF cycle is more often successful, obviating the need for repeated cycles of treatment.

Conclusion

UK healthcare providers have sought to provide a solution to as many couples'



Careful adherence to lifestyle changes can be effective in 10% of men, and further investigation reveals treatable causes of infertility in a further 15%

infertility as local budgets can afford. However, the 'solution' is almost always IVF, and thus, for the male partners, treatment has inadvertently been ignored.

The treatment of male-factor fertility has become confused with the apparent solution, IVF. Fertility Solutions aims to provide an accessible, inexpensive service for men, before a relatively inaccessible and expensive intervention becomes necessary.

» CASE HISTORY

A 29-year-old man contacted Fertility Solutions, because he was finding it difficult to access local services via his general practitioner. He and his wife had been trying for a baby for 18 months, without success.

The semen analysis revealed a low sperm count, with signs of infection, which could be easily seen down the microscope. Further discussion with the patient, who was himself concerned about his obesity, revealed a strong family history of diabetes. Referral back to his primary care physician revealed that the patient himself was diabetic, and that he was also suffering from a genital-tract infection.

Treatment of both conditions, and significant weight loss, has resulted in a 300% improvement in the sperm count, and in the quality of the sperm, and the patient's wife is now pregnant.