

Unmesh Desai AM

London Assembly Member for City and East



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London
SE1 2AA

**City Hall
More London Estate
London
SE1 2AA**

2nd August 2019

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the London Health Board, following discussions with Fertility Network UK, to ask that you raise the issue of unequal provision of IVF treatment across London and investigate how our CCGs can be encouraged to follow the guidelines set by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

Infertility affects one in six couples in London. Studies have shown that 90% of patients suffering from infertility issues have had some form of depression, 42% of whom have experienced suicidal tendencies. It is not surprising that 75% of patients say infertility damaged their relationship. I'm sure you would agree that the toll on the mental health of the very many Londoners affected by infertility is something we need to address.

NICE guidelines for fertility treatment recommend three full IVF cycles (three fresh cycles plus any subsequent frozen cycles) as being the most cost effective and clinically effective way to treat infertility. However, Londoners currently face huge variations in their ability to access three full cycles, with most CCGs only offering one cycle per person. Freedom of Information requests revealed that only Camden follows NICE guidance fully. As such, currently only 26% of all London cycles are NHS funded.

With one cycle of IVF in the private sector costing on average £5000-£8000, the lack of full provision across London CCGs means that many Londoners are being priced out of trying for a family. This contributes towards the aforementioned detrimental impacts on patients' mental health, puts huge strains upon relationships and, we have also heard, has led to some patients travelling abroad for cheaper IVF provision under different regulatory systems, resulting in higher instances of risky multiple births.

Studies have shown that, on average, funding three cycles of IVF should cost a CCG just 0.108% of its total budget. However, some CCGs are still being overcharged for their IVF treatment by providers and are paying as much as £11000 per cycle. We need to understand why so many London CCGs are not reaching the benchmark pricing of £3100-3500 per cycle, as set out by NHS England. Were this met across the board, availability could increase at no extra cost.

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This is a stark health inequality where the rich can afford to start a family while the rest must deal with NHS services that do not reach the minimum standard. I would be very grateful if you can raise this with the Health Board at the earliest opportunity and inform me what steps NHS organisations are taking to allow delivery of three full cycles of IVF across London.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Unmesh Desai". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Unmesh Desai AM
Assembly Member for City & East London