

Blocked, the £4 drug that could help infertile women

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

THOUSANDS of infertile women are being denied a £4 drug which could triple their chance of getting pregnant, research suggests.

The NHS rationing body has rejected use of the treatment, combined with insemination, for women with unexplained infertility.

Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) says that couples in such a situation should keep trying for two years, then have IVF.

However, research presented at the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology in

Geneva shows that the drugs – which can cost as little as £4 per cycle – massively increase the chance of pregnancy.

A Nice spokesman said last night that it planned to update its guideline taking into account new research, including this paper. He said: “Other research has already been considered and means this guideline will be updated. This new paper will be considered as part of that update.”

The study by University of Auckland tracked more than 200 couples. Half were given insemination treatment, with the pills which stimulate the egg production. The other half were given standard NHS advice – to

just keep trying for two years. After a year, 31 per cent of those given the treatment, called intrauterine stimulation (IUI), had a baby, compared with nine per cent among those left to keep trying. The treatment is designed to improve fertility rates by stimulating egg production in the ovaries and injecting sperm directly into the womb.

About 900,000 couples a year – a quarter of those with infertility problems – have unexplained infertility.

Fertility experts have urged NHS rationing bodies to rewrite their advice, saying it was “unacceptable” to leave infertile couples to “wait and see” when time was running out.

Lead researcher Cindy Farquhar, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Auckland, said: “I hope Nice will look at this now. Asking women to ‘just keep trying’ is pretty unpopular.”

Prof Farquhar said many couples could benefit from help which was less invasive than IVF. She said: “IVF has such a burden physically and emotionally. IUI is a lower impact.”

Dr Gillian Lockwood, of IVI, urged Nice to rewrite the guidance. “The evidence is very compelling,” she said. “Most couples find it unacceptable to be told to keep trying for two years when they are likely to have already been trying for years.”

Telegraph 4.7.17

