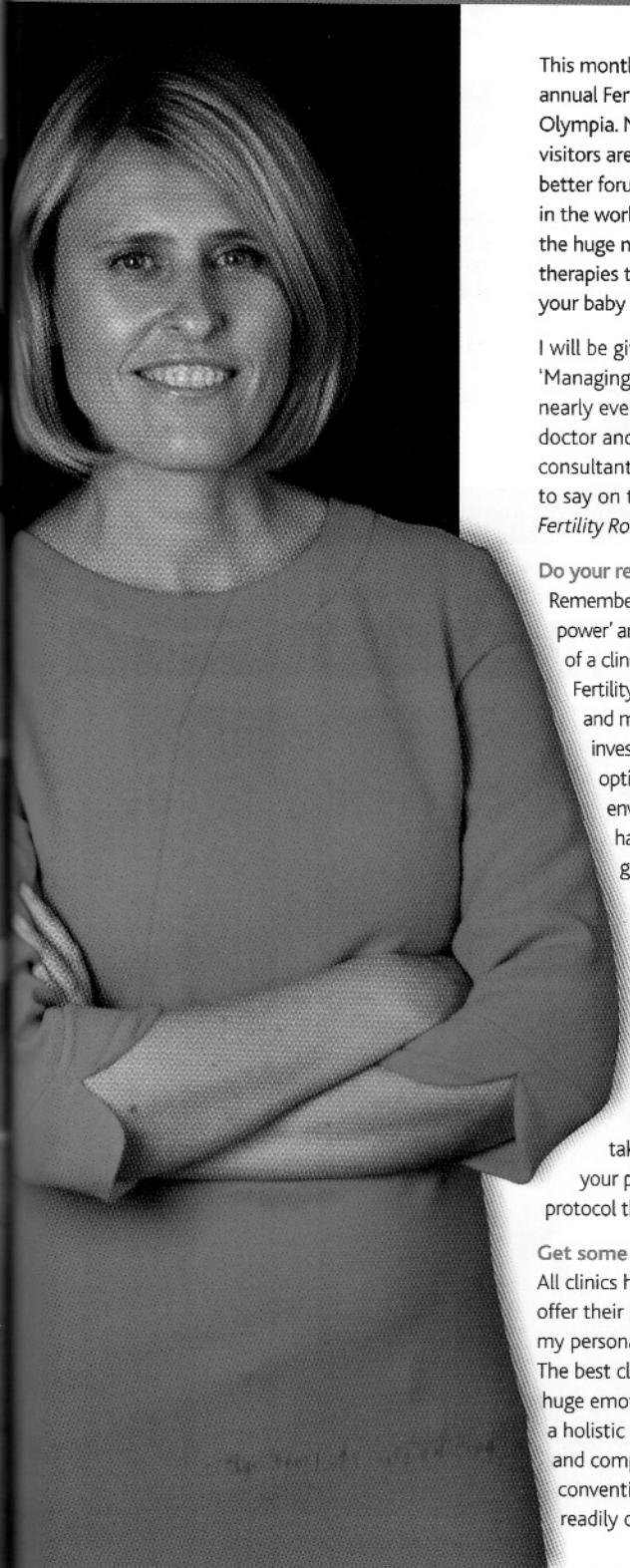


FROM A PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

A COLUMN BY JESSICA HEPBURN, AUTHOR OF THE PURSUIT OF MOTHERHOOD
THIS MONTH: HOW TO MANAGE YOUR FERTILITY CLINIC



This month I've been asked to speak at the annual Fertility Show which is held every year at Olympia. Now in its sixth year, more than 3,000 visitors are expected to attend and there is no better forum for hearing about the latest thinking in the world of fertility and for finding out about the huge number of clinics and complementary therapies that are available to help you make your baby dreams come true.

I will be giving a seminar on the subject of 'Managing Your Fertility Clinic'. Having had nearly every test known to woman and doctor and been to almost a dozen clinics and consultants, I've definitely got a thing or two to say on the subject. So here, especially for *Fertility Road* readers, are my top five tips:

Do your research

Remember the famous saying that 'knowledge is power' and before you even get to the front door of a clinic make sure you've done your research. Fertility treatment often takes a lot of time and money to deliver results. The more you invest in finding out about the treatment options available to you and the different environments and approaches that clinics have, the more control you'll feel you've got over your fertility journey.

Seek a diagnosis

If you are having trouble conceiving, in my opinion your number one aim is to seek a diagnosis. It might seem a simplistic thing to say but it's so much easier to fix a problem if you know what the problem is you're trying to fix. The best medical practitioners will take time to really understand you and your partner's history and design a treatment protocol that is tailor-made.

Get some emotional support

All clinics have a statutory responsibility to offer their patients access to counselling but my personal experience is that many do not. The best clinics recognise that infertility has a huge emotional impact and offer their patients a holistic service which includes therapeutic and complementary therapies alongside conventional medicine. If your clinic doesn't readily offer this, then ask for it and if they

don't give it to you make sure you get it for yourself or go elsewhere.

Set a budget

With the continued inequality of IVF treatment on the National Health Service, most couples are being forced to go through fertility treatment privately. Ideally clinics should be able to let you know the costs before you start but in my experience this information is often difficult to obtain. They may happily give you their 'price list' but they often won't give you a definitive answer on how much you're going to have to pay. This is because it depends on a range of factors which include the amount of drugs you need, the procedure you have and the day your embryos go back.

So my advice is to accept that this may be the case and instead set yourself a clear budget at the start of your treatment based on what you think you can afford and are prepared to spend. You can always increase it later but having clear money milestones will help you control your finances in a way that clinics can't and won't.

Explore all the options

Finally, I would really recommend exploring all your options early on in your fertility journey. By this I mean the different possibilities for achieving parenthood including fostering, adoption, donation and surrogacy.

You should also take time to consider what a life without children might look and feel like for you. For some this will be an unorthodox suggestion because many professionals advise that you should not pursue alternatives until you've moved on from trying to have your own biological baby. But, to use a bad metaphor, many clinics make you put all your eggs in one basket and it may take years to find out it's the wrong one. For this reason I believe it will really help if you consider all the options early on so you don't run out of emotional energy and financial resources to consider other avenues in your pursuit of motherhood and life fulfilment if you need to.

I do hope you find these tips useful. I'd also be delighted to hear your thoughts on how clinics can be improved for patients so I can talk and write about it. Do let me know via my blog, which you can find on my website thepursuitofmotherhood.com.