Description

Support for midwives with infertility and having fertility treatments

Katie Eaves – Senior Midwife at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust



Me, Kate Brian, Jessica Clasby Monk

I'm really pleased to introduce you to Katie, a midwife passionate about IVF. Katie shares a blog about her personal experiences and the impact of infertility on her professional role. She now runs study days to share knowledge and responds to many enquires from midwives reaching out for support.

It can be so hard caring for pregnant women when you're going through IVF and infertility. For me it was one of the hardest things I have ever been through. I've always been very open about my experiences, and I understand how isolating it can be for those going through infertility themselves.

I feel lucky as I became a mother following successful In Vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment. Sadly though, in later years I had many failed treatments in my husband and I's desperate attempts to get pregnant again. This was a very difficult time for me both personally and professionally especially working as a midwife and eventually I couldn't cope anymore. I left midwifery, not knowing if I'd ever return.

However, with the help of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and the passing of 2 years I recovered enough to come back to work, now with a new found drive and passion for my profession.

Reflection

It was during this time that I started to reflect on my own pregnancy experience, realising when pregnant with our daughter following IVF, that I had been very anxious – beyond what would normally be expected.

Even though successfully pregnant, deep down I was still recovering emotionally from the years of infertility and the profound effect this had on me and my partner. More than anything else I just needed my feelings and experiences to be acknowledged by those caring for me. When they eventually were, this had a huge positive effect on how I felt and subsequently my birth experience.

Doing something – positive support



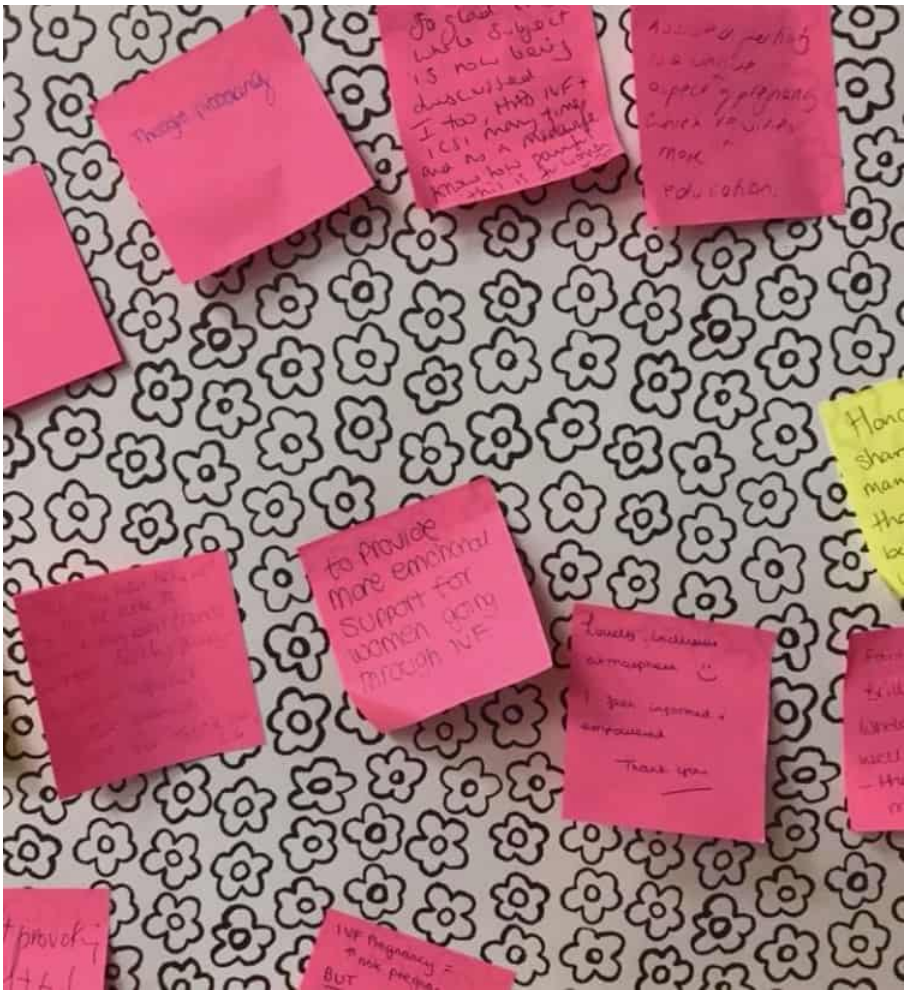
Katie Brian Introducing the session

I am now passionate about improving care for those pregnant after IVF and infertility, to raise awareness of the specific needs for these families, especially the psychological support needed. This has led me to running and organising study days on IVF pregnancy – in my hopes to make it a better maternity experience for families affected.

The last study day in October included talks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), donor conception, fertility treatments, breast feeding, woman's stories, screening issues and psychological support required.

The feedback was unbelievable and so positive. One attendee said

> "Such an amazing, moving, mind expanding day and I'll be reflecting on this for a long time to come and I know it'll improve the care I'm able to give to women!"



Feedback from the session

When delegates report that they have a much better understanding of IVF and that it will have a huge impact on the way they care for families with IVF pregnancy, it made all the hard work organising this non-profit study day in my own time so worthwhile!

I really hope this blog with my tips and advice can help those working in maternity with infertility.

Reaching out

Firstly, and most importantly – talk about it. Talk to your friends, colleagues, family. They may not understand or give you the answers you want but tell them anyway. Tell them what you're going through, how you feel. Be brave and do it. Talk with your managers too so they can be given the opportunity to give you the support you need and have some understanding of how you feel about what's going on in your life. Tell them what you need from them.

This is what you can ask your managers: flexibility with shift patterns and the length of shifts. If you need to avoid long shifts, night shifts or to have a better working pattern ask your mangers about this. IVF treatment is a gruelling process, emotionally and physically and the demands of working as a midwife whilst this is going on in your life can be so tough. Maybe even impossible.

Making change work

Consider your work area and if you need to change this. Do you prefer working on labour ward with the team, working at a faster pace because this is a good distraction? Some people cope better when they are working like this as they prefer not thinking about it all the time. Or do you feel you need to work in a different environment, community, clinics?

Have a think about what area might work best for you, as everyone is so different. It might well be that you prefer antenatal areas as you find supporting women to birth or to care for their babies too painful. These are valid feelings and you need to make sure you're in the best place to work during this difficult time of life.

> Think about what aspects of midwifery are triggers for your emotions.

Student midwives, talk to your peers about what you're going through and let university know as well. Find a lecturer that you feel comfortable to talk to. Get the support you need with academic work and placements, as this will need to work around your fertility treatments and appointments.

Managers please understand and show compassion towards midwives going through infertility and treatments. IVF is not a routine procedure and can affect every aspect of a person's life, physically, emotionally, socially and financially.

Midwives supporting midwives

Being a midwife and caring for women and families through pregnancy and birth can be so difficult when you want it so much yourself. This is a period in that midwifes' life when they will need support, it's a temporary situation and with enough support, they will continue into their profession afterwards for many years. Please also read the link from Fertility Network U.K with information for employers.

I was lucky enough to have a fantastic supervisor of midwives that supported me all the way from when I was a student to a qualified midwife. So please reach out for your P.M.A (Professional Midwifery Advocate) and let them know how you feel, what is happening and how they can support you. This may be just talking through how you feel at work or getting advice as to how to approach managers about working patterns or needing to attend appointments etc.

Utilising workplace protection

Check your policy at work and your rights within your trust as this varies through the U.K. Contact your occupational health department and get their advice too. If you are having difficulties with your working pattern or being able to attend appointments, then contact your H.R department. You need to be given some flexibility to attend appointments so that you're not using up all your annual leave or accumulating sick leave in order to do this. Going through IVF is hard enough without then having the stress of facing a disciplinary for sickness and you'll need that annual leave now more than ever to rest, recover and look after yourself. Please see the Fertility Network U.K link above regarding your rights at work, including your rights with time off work following the embryo transfer.

Self care

Expect the good days and the bad days! Emotions will be up and down along your journey. There will be some days you might wake up and feel like it's a struggle just to even get out of bed and go to work. Then at other times you may really enjoy being around your colleagues, the positive aspects of birth and the distraction from the IVF process.

Invest in some self-care in whatever shape or form this may take (aromatherapy, acupuncture, massage, yoga) to help relieve stress, to make you feel more relaxed and have that 'time out' to focus on your general well-being with the IVF process. This is so important. Most fertility clinics offer counselling, and you may also be able to access counselling through your Trust with support from the occupational health department.

Final thoughts

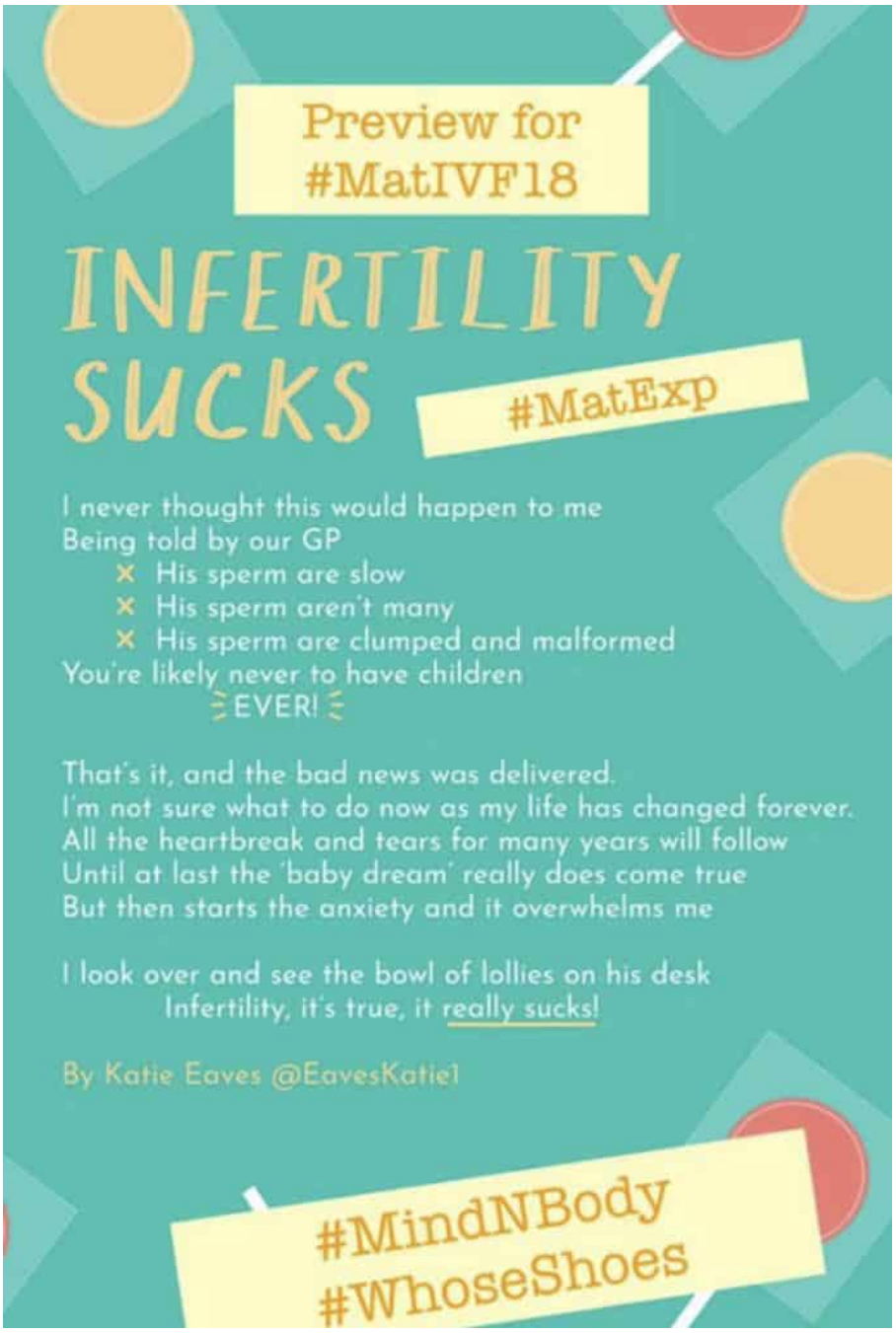
Be open, even though this may feel hard to do. This doesn't mean that everyone needs to know your business. Just make sure that you're letting those that need to know, know. Your managers and colleagues will be sensitive to your emotions and feelings and it goes without saying that they need to maintain confidentiality when you are open with them.

I hope that this blog reaches out to those affected with infertility. I felt very isolated myself and really didn't know what to do. My job became another stress in my already very stressful situation. I think now fortunately times have changed and there is more understanding within the midwifery profession. I hope this blog goes some way to improve it even more.

Resources

Fertility Network U.K is a fantastic charity supporting families with infertility and they are doing great work to improve employee's rights at work during this time. Thank you to them for all they do and for allowing me to add their link below.

And for anyone going through it now remember…..#YouAreNotAlone



A poem I wrote for the 'Whose Shoes' #MindNBody project if any good to use as well. Gill Phillips tweeted a preview of the poem on the study day.

Category

1. All4Maternity Blog

Tags

1. Infertility
2. IVF

Date Created
23rd April 2019