



This year’s Annual Report reflects our ongoing commitment and efforts to improving patient care and advancing reproductive health.

In 2024, we focused on three key objectives centred around supporting individuals before they become patients, addressing male fertility more directly, and expanding access to genetic screening options.



Improvement of  
Patient Experience



Focus on  
Male Fertility



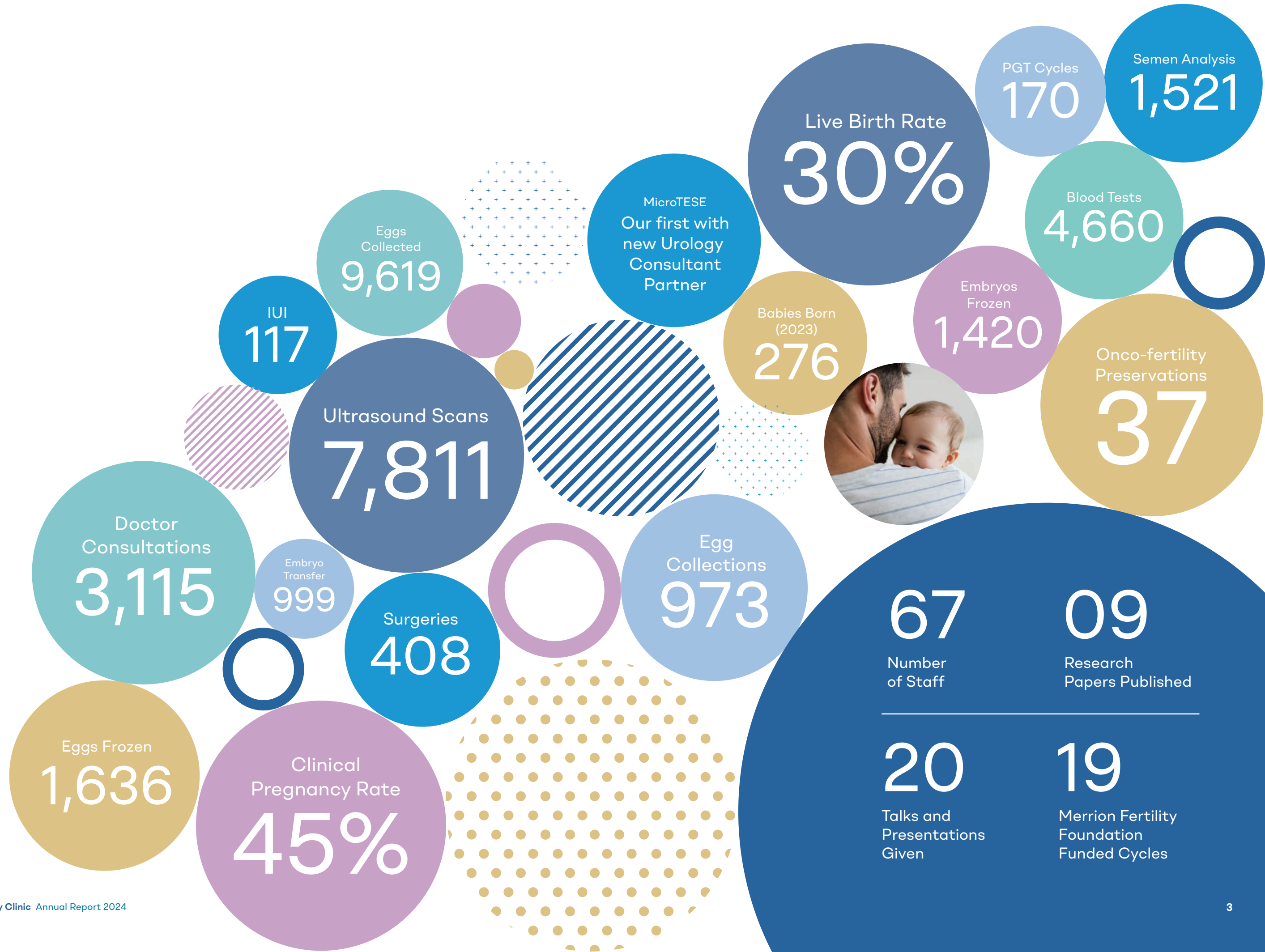
Genetic Testing  
Programme



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# 2024 At a Glance





# Introduction from Our Clinical Director



45%

Clinical pregnancy rate compares favourably with international success rates.

Dear Readers,

First and foremost, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to our patients. Each individual and couple who walks through our doors entrusts us with one of life's most personal and profound journeys—the hope of building a family, which is a privilege we never take lightly.

To our remarkable team of clinicians, embryologists, nurses, administrators, and support staff, thank you for your unwavering professionalism, dedication, and kindness. Your commitment ensures that Merrion Fertility Clinic remains a centre of clinical excellence, and your expertise and empathy contribute to the highest standards of patient care.

2024 has been a year marked by meaningful progress, innovation, and expansion. We provided over 3,000 doctor consultations, conducted nearly 8,000 ultrasound scans, and performed almost 1,000 egg collections. Our clinical pregnancy rate of 45% compares very favourably with international success rate benchmarks and is a strong reflection of our continued focus on safe and evidence-based practices in an ever-evolving field.

We were especially proud to launch new services that meet emerging needs in fertility care. This year saw the expansion of our preimplantation genetic testing (PGT) programme, the launch of our reciprocal IVF service, and the introduction of microTESE procedures in partnership with Beacon Hospital and specialist Urology Consultant colleague.

Our collaboration with the Irish Cancer Society to support fertility preservation for adolescent and young adult cancer patients continues to be a source of great pride. The extension of funding for this programme into 2025 is a testament to its impact, and we are deeply grateful to be part of this transformative initiative. For many of these young patients, fertility preservation represents hope for the future in the face of a devastating diagnosis.

Equally significant was our successful hosting of the inaugural Fertility Study Day in October. This event brought together healthcare professionals from across disciplines to share knowledge, challenge assumptions, and advance patient-centred fertility care in Ireland. The overwhelmingly positive feedback we received is a reminder of the power of collective learning and the need for ongoing dialogue in our field.

From a governance and quality perspective, we successfully completed two major external audits in 2024: an inspection by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and a voluntary reaccreditation by SGS under the ISO 9001:2015 framework. The absence of major non-conformities in either audit reflects our team's commitment to clinical excellence, continuous improvement, and patient safety.

Our research team has continued to make significant contributions to the field of reproductive medicine. With nine peer-reviewed publications and twenty presentations delivered across national and international forums, Merrion Fertility Clinic remains at the forefront of scientific inquiry. These research efforts are not only academic achievements—they translate into better understanding, more personalised treatments, and ultimately, improved outcomes for our patients.

Looking inward, we focused on enhancing the patient experience within our own walls. From expanding our recovery area, to improving our patient leaflets, and strengthening cybersecurity protocols with the implementation of Darktrace AI technology, we have taken concrete steps to ensure that every aspect of our service reflects quality, safety, and respect for the individual.

As we prepare for 2025, we remain focused on further broadening our services, including a new egg donation programme in partnership with a European donor bank and the continued development of our male fertility services.

Thank you once again to our patients for your trust and to our team for your tireless efforts. Together, we have achieved so much in 2024—and we look forward with confidence and hope to all that lies ahead.

Warm regards,

**Dr David Crosby**  
Clinical Director  
Merrion Fertility Clinic

# Governance and Management





## Our Board of Directors

Merrion Fertility Clinic is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. The board is made up of Prof Shane Higgins, Master of the National Maternity Hospital, Prof Declan Keane and Dr Orla Sheil, both holding the role of Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist at the National Maternity Hospital, Fiona Duffy, Solicitor & Partner at the law firm PF O'Reilly & Co., Mary Doherty, owner of Red Dog Creative Agency, Dr Peter Joyce, a GP and Deirdre Hogan, Partner at EY.

The composition of the board reflects the strong commitment of Merrion Fertility Clinic to excellence in medical practice, with three of the seven members working as Consultants at the National Maternity Hospital, including the Master, Prof Shane Higgins. A fourth member of the board is also a practicing Doctor, a GP, and working to support our interactions with the wider community. Finally, the other members of the board bring, legal, financial and business experience to the team to ensure the Clinic complies with legislation and manages its resources efficiently to best serve our patients.

The board meet regularly during the year and are responsible for governance, strategy and oversight of how the Clinic is being managed.

## Senior Leadership Team

Our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) comprises Dr David Crosby, CEO & Clinical Director, Dr Renato Bauman, Medical Director, Georgina Kearney, Chief Operating Officer and Aoife Campbell, General Manager.

Working with the Board of Directors, the SLT set the Clinic objectives for the coming years. The team meets regularly with each department manager to direct and monitor how these objectives are being achieved. These meetings support discussion and allow decisions to be taken on any issues as they arise. Combined with active monitoring of patient feedback, this approach makes the SLT very effective at driving continuous improvement.

## Charitable Objectives

Merrion Fertility Clinic is incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee and is a registered charity (Registered Charity Number 20039660).

The ongoing work of the charity is to provide access to fertility treatments to those who require it, including financial aid, if required, to support the continuing education of the wider community in relation to the provision of fertility preservation and assisted reproduction, to advance the field of assisted reproduction through research.

This report will highlight the work we have undertaken to advance these aims in 2024.

## Department Managers



**Georgina Kearney**  
Chief Operating Officer



**Jennifer Cullinane**  
Laboratory Manager  
& Person Responsible



**Dr Aoife Campbell**  
General Manager



**Carol Whelan**  
Patient Services Manager



**Helena Mooney**  
Nursing Manager

MEET OUR DOCTORS



**Dr David Crosby**  
Clinical Director, Consultant  
Gynaecologist & Obstetrician  
Expertise: Genetic services



**Dr Renato Bauman**  
Medical Director  
Expertise: Surrogacy



**Prof Cathy Allen**  
Consultant Gynaecologist  
& Obstetrician  
Expertise: Male factor, recurrent  
miscarriage, genetic services



**Dr Fiona Martyn**  
Consultant Gynaecologist  
& Obstetrician  
Expertise: Donor sperm  
& egg services, surgery



**Dr Nita Adnan**  
Consultant Gynaecologist  
& Obstetrician  
Expertise: Cryostorage of  
eggs, sperm & embryos



**Dr Maebh Horan**  
Consultant Gynaecologist  
& Obstetrician  
Expertise: Fertility preservation  
for oncology patients

Clinical Fellows



**Dr Sarah Petch**



**Dr Ciara Nolan**



**Dr Niamh Fee**



# Quality and Patient Safety







2024 was another milestone year for the clinic, marked by two successful external inspections — one by our regulator, the Health Products Regulatory Authority, (HPRA) in February and another for our voluntary ISO 9001:2015 reaccreditation by SGS Ireland in November. Both assessments reaffirmed our high standards, with no major non-conformities identified. Our dedication to excellence is strengthened by voluntary independent evaluations from ISO and CHKS, ensuring we continuously evolve to meet patient needs. We also maintain a strong, collaborative relationship with the HPRA, keeping us proactive and well-informed on regulatory requirements.



Jessica Quinn  
Quality  
Manager

Alongside these external audits, we run a rigorous internal auditing programme, which plays a pivotal role in driving continuous improvement across all areas of operation. These audits cover critical aspects such as patient pathways, health and safety, infection control, traceability, and equipment standards, ensuring we uphold best practices at all times.

Patient feedback is also central to our Quality Management System with suggestions actively shaping service improvements. In 2024, we focused on enhancing patient information and accessibility, refining our leaflets and communication channels based on direct input from patients.

Patient safety remains at the core of everything we do. A key advancement this year was the expansion of our recovery area following egg collection. With the addition of another patient bay, we have improved patient comfort and extended recovery time, further enhancing the overall care experience.

#### IT Security

As the security and confidentiality of patient data is a top priority, in 2024, we made the decision to strengthen our already robust IT security by trialling Darktrace, a leading cybersecurity solution powered by artificial intelligence. The trial was highly successful, and we officially implemented Darktrace in early 2025. Darktrace continuously monitors our digital environment in real-time, using AI to detect and respond to potential cyber threats before they can cause harm. By investing in advanced technologies like Darktrace, we aim to give our patients peace of mind that their sensitive data is handled with the highest level of care and security.

Our new  
recovery  
room



Above: Our new recovery room



At Merrion Fertility Clinic, education and research are central to our mission. We actively work to improve services for patients experiencing infertility and as part of this we ran our first Fertility Study Day in October 2024.

The day was a way for us to engage with the healthcare professionals in our community. To bring together the GP's, nurses, counsellors, dietitians and other allied health care professionals to share knowledge, explore the latest advancements in fertility medicine, and strengthen our collective efforts in supporting patients on their fertility journey.

Jointly organised by Merrion Fertility Clinic and the National Maternity Hospital, this event marked a significant milestone in our mission to foster a multidisciplinary, evidence-based approach to reproductive healthcare. Fertility Study Day 2024 was designed as a learning and networking opportunity for general practitioners, nurses, consultants, health-care professionals, and fertility specialists alike. Attendees were invited to join in person or virtually, making the event accessible nationwide.

Promoting education and collaboration in fertility care



Programme Highlights

The Study Day began with a presentation from Dr. Louise Glover, PhD, Head of Research at MFC, titled *Celebrating 25 Years of MFC*. Dr. Glover reflected on the clinic's history, its ongoing research contributions, and its vision for the future. This powerful opening set the tone for the day's theme: integrating research, innovation, and patient-centred care to improve fertility outcomes.

Our programme featured presentations from a distinguished panel of experts who shared clinical insights and current best practices across a broad spectrum of topics, including:

- Fertility in General Practice**  
Dr Danielle O'Leary, Ross Medical Practice
- Public Funding for Fertility Treatment**  
Dr Niamh Joyce and Michelle Barry, RN, Fertility Hub
- AYA Fertility Preservation Service**  
Helena Moloney, RN, MFC Nurse Manager
- Male Factor Infertility**  
Prof Cathy Allen, Consultant at MFC & NMH
- Reproductive Genetics**  
Dr David Crosby, CEO of MFC & Head of NMH Fertility Hub
- Irish GPs and Fertility: Knowledge and Attitudes**  
Dr Sarah Petch, MFC
- Surrogacy in Ireland—Present and Future Challenges**  
Dr Renato Bauman, MFC Medical Director
- Nutritional Considerations in PCOS**  
Orla Walsh, Dietitian
- The Impact of Fertility Treatment on Sexual Relationships**  
Corinne Henry-Bezy, RN, Psychosexual Therapist
- Laparoscopic Egg Collection**  
Dr Sarah Petch, MFC
- A Look at Reproductive Surgery**  
Dr Fiona Martyn, Consultant at MFC & NMH
- What's Next for ART?**  
Dr Aoife Campbell, PhD, Innovation Manager

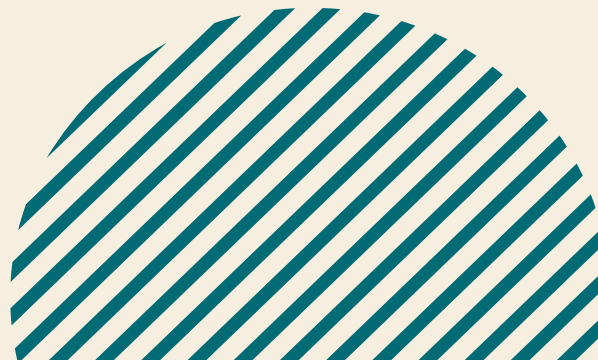
This diverse and multidisciplinary line-up ensured that all participants, regardless of specialty, gained valuable insights and practical take-aways. Presentations were structured in a clear and accessible format, featuring short, engaging sessions that encouraged interaction and reflection.

Fertility Study Day was fully accredited for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP), Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI), and The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI). All attendees received certificates of attendance to document their professional development.





Fertility  
Study Day  
2024





# Attendee Feedback

Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive. A post-event survey revealed that 99% of attendees would attend a similar event in the future, a testament to the quality, relevance, and organisation of the Fertility Study Day. Participants particularly appreciated the wide scope of topics and the opportunity to hear from professionals in various specialties.

Some comments from attendees included:

“  
It was great that the meeting was multidisciplinary and different professionals explained different aspects of care.

“  
All of the talks were very informative, even for those from a non-medical background.

“  
Nice short talks covering a wide variety of topics. All very relevant.  
Excellent study day.

“  
I now have a better understanding of the publicly funded fertility service and the referral process.

“  
The talks were structured in a way where it was easy to follow along, with advance notice of topics so I knew which ones would be most relevant to me.

“  
The broad range of topics covered were very helpful. Often, we focus on our own specific field and lose awareness of what's happening in other subspecialties.

“  
Genetic research was very informative and interesting, as well as the practical surgical segment.

We are already looking ahead with enthusiasm to our next Fertility Study Day. With more advancements on the horizon in assisted reproduction, genetics, fertility preservation, and patient support, we look forward to continuing this journey of knowledge-sharing and innovation.



# Our Connection with



the National  
Maternity  
Hospital



The strength of our working relationship with the National Maternity Hospital at Holles Street has many benefits for our patients.



**Consultant Anaesthetists**

All patients of Merrion Fertility Clinic who undergo egg collection are cared for by Consultant Anaesthetists. This provides the best possible care while under sedation and the most comfortable experience. For some patients, embryo transfer can be a very difficult procedure, these women can also avail of the care provided by Consultant Anaesthetists.

Male patients attending Merrion Fertility Clinic for surgical sperm retrieval can also benefit.

**Diagnostics and treatment**

Merrion Fertility Clinic can, via our link to the National Maternity Hospital, provide direct access to advanced diagnostic and treatment options for our patients, while still under our care. For women with conditions including endometriosis, intrauterine polyps or fibroids, this can make a significant difference.

**Hysteroscopy**

The procedure uses a thin, telescope-like device, called a hysteroscope, to look inside the uterus. This can let a doctor know if there is an issue that may need to be investigated further or treated. Depending on your circumstance, this can be done as an outpatient procedure, or under general anaesthetic in theatre.

**Reproductive surgery**

Procedures like laparoscopy or tubal surgery can be of benefit for patients undergoing fertility treatment and can be carried out by Merrion Fertility Clinic doctors. For a small group of patients, it is necessary to carry out egg collection laparoscopically. Most patients can have their eggs collected vaginally but, for example in cases of cervical cancer, this must be avoided. Laparoscopic egg collection allows access to the ovary via the abdominal wall, but must be done in a theatre setting as is available in the National Maternity Hospital. Merrion Fertility Clinic is the only fertility centre in Ireland which can provide this service to patients.

**Fallopian tube assessments**

Checking the health and function of fallopian tubes can be done using ultrasound (hysterosalpingo contrast sonography, HyCoSy) or by x-ray (hysterosalpingography, HSG). For most patients, ultrasound works well, but in some cases a doctor may recommend using x-ray. Ultrasound checks can be completed in the Clinic and patients needing x-ray assessment can access this in the National Maternity Hospital.

**Emergency Situations**

The NMH has an emergency room for women who have complications during pregnancy and for the first 6 weeks after birth. Suspected miscarriage and ectopic pregnancies would be common reasons for presenting to the emergency room.

Our patients would liaise with our nursing team if they are experiencing difficulties and in these situations, we will often refer them to the emergency room. Our doctors and nursing team will always follow up with patients who have had to be referred for emergency hospital care.

**Continuity of Care When Pregnant**

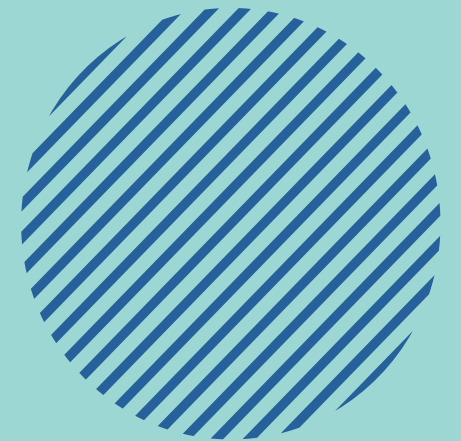
Our NMH Consultants all provide obstetric and pregnancy care so it is often the case that our patients choose to continue their pregnancy care with the same doctor who looked after them on their fertility journey.







# Clinical Fellowship Programme







Merrion Fertility Clinic is Ireland's only fertility clinic with a dedicated research department and full time Head of Research. Our research strives to advance scientific discovery in the field of subfertility and reproductive medicine to ultimately improve success rates for our patients. Over the years, our clinic has established strong research links with some of Ireland's primary academic research institutions, including University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT).



Dr Ciara Nolan  
Researcher

Our research team frequently collaborates with expert scientific groups within UCD Schools of Medicine, Public Health, Veterinary Medicine and Food Science. Merrion Fertility Clinic is also a member of the UCD Perinatal Research Centre, led by Centre Director Professor Fionnuala McAuliffe, that coordinates national and international research in maternal health and its impact on maternal and infant outcomes. We also have longstanding and productive collaborations with leading academic scientists in TCD School of Biochemistry and Immunology, with a particular focus on immune factors that may impact male fertility and embryo implantation in the uterus. Our research studies have been funded by grants from Health Research Board Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the National Maternity Hospital Medical Fund.

Merrion Fertility Clinic is also strongly committed to the training and education of doctors in fertility management, sound research methodology and evidence-based medicine. Since 2010, as part of our research and professional development program, MFC has provided a 2 year training program at specialist registrar level for obstetrician and gynaecologist medical trainees, all of whom have also successfully completed post-graduate M.D. degrees through the School of Medicine at UCD. Merrion Fertility Clinic is accredited by the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) as an ESHRE/EBCOG (European Board and College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology) — affiliated subspecialist training centre in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery. ESHRE recognition of our subspecialty training program has formalised training at a senior level in Reproductive Medicine and allows our trainees to apply to become European Fellows of Reproductive Medicine (EFRM). Ten clinical fellows have now successfully graduated through our MD program, and several have returned to Merrion Fertility Clinic and the National Maternity Hospital as Consultants and fertility specialists.

In 2024, we were delighted to welcome Dr Ciara Nolan and Dr Niamh Fee to our research program as fertility specialists and postgraduate research candidates undertaking a Doctorate of Medicine (MD). Dr Ciara Nolan completed her primary degree in Biomedical, Life and Health Sciences in UCD, and graduated with honours in Medicine from the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) in 2014. She is a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (RCOG) and Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI). Dr Nolan's research will focus on environmental factors that impact sperm count and male fertility, such as diet and BMI. She is currently conducting a study on the impact of dietary pre-conception supplements on sperm quality.



Dr Niamh Fee  
Researcher

Dr Niamh Fee graduated with honours in medicine from UCD and is a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2022) and the Royal College of Physicians (2017). She completed her specialist training in obstetrics and gynaecology from Royal College of Physicians in Ireland in 2024. Dr Fee's research studies are focused on fertility preservation and the role of AI in assisted reproduction.

# Research in 2024

Merrion Fertility Clinic studies carried out in 2024 spanned a range of research avenues, from the basic biology of male and female infertility to identification of new clinical biomarkers, as well as investigations of healthcare provider knowledge of new referral pathways and public funding for fertility treatment.





# GPs Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Fertility Management and Funding

Public funding for assisted human reproduction (AHR) was introduced in 2023 for couples who meet strict access criteria. To avail of this funding, couples must first be referred by their GP to one of six regional fertility hubs. The GP is often the first healthcare provider that people encounter when they experience infertility, and therefore they play a key role in fertility care. Dr Sarah Petch carried out a survey study of Irish GPs, to evaluate their knowledge and attitudes towards fertility management and public fertility funding. Major findings from this study include that almost 70% of GPs surveyed had no training in subfertility investigations, 97% felt they would benefit from more education on fertility, and many feel the access criteria for public funding should be broadened. This study was published in October 2024 in the European Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and was picked up by both The Journal online and the Irish Examiner. Dr Petch was also awarded the prize for Best Audit at the National Maternity Hospital Research and Innovation Symposium Exhibition. This is the first study to directly address Irish GPs as the primary healthcare provider in the public fertility pathway, and our findings underscore that there is still a need for education and outreach, in order to benefit both GPs and patients.

Dr Sarah Petch  
Clinical  
Research Fellow



A Survey study of Irish GPs, to evaluate their knowledge and attitudes towards fertility management and public fertility funding.

**70%** of GPs surveyed had no training in subfertility investigations

**97%** felt they would benefit from more education on fertility, and many feel the access criteria for public funding should be broadened.

European Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, October 2024

Source: The Journal Online and Irish Examiner

## COVID-19 vaccine and Fertility

Similar to influenza, COVID-19 virus outbreaks are starting to show a seasonal pattern. Influenza and COVID-19 infections in pregnancy are associated with higher rates of adverse events, such as hospitalisation, intensive care admission and poor obstetric outcomes. There is now reassuring data and widespread support for COVID-19 vaccination before and after conception among international fertility societies and reproductive medicine specialists. A survey study of 588 pregnant women in the National Maternity Hospital showed that while influenza vaccine uptake in pregnancy has improved in the last few years, COVID-19 vaccine uptake in pregnancy remains low (Kelly S (2024), Irish Journal Medical Science). COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy also continues to be observed among men of reproductive age in many jurisdictions. A study on the impact of COVID-19 vaccine on sperm and inflammatory parameters, led by Dr Laurentina Schaler, was carried out in collaboration with Dr Vincent Kelly in Trinity College Dublin. Findings provided reassurance that no significant adverse effect of vaccination was noted and provided evidence to support the current recommendations of reproductive medicine organisations regarding timing of vaccination during fertility treatment. This study was published in August 2024 in the international Journal of Reproductive Immunology.

## Novel biomarkers of Sperm Quality

Infertility research has traditionally focused on female reproduction factors. However, sperm issues are identified in around 50% of couples seeking fertility treatment, and there is a growing appreciation that more research is needed to identify causes of and effective treatments for male infertility. Non-invasive sperm protein markers that correlate with sperm quality and health would be highly valuable for identification and removal of damaged sperm prior to assisted reproductive technology. In a collaborative study with the research team at Merrion Fertility Clinic, Dr Vincent Kelly (Trinity College Dublin) recently identified the protein 'receptor for advanced glycation end products' (RAGE) on the sperm surface membrane as a biomarker of low-quality sperm. Membrane-bound RAGE directly correlates with low sperm motility, high cell permeability, decreased mitochondrial function, DNA fragmentation, and higher levels of cell death. Results of this study suggest that RAGE expression is a molecular marker of sperm cell health, with important implications for improved fertility treatment and diagnoses of unexplained infertility.

This study was published in Human Reproduction Open in November 2024.

## PUBLISHED RESEARCH

### Microbiota and glycosylation in endometriosis

Endometriosis is a debilitating gynaecological disorder that leads to painful periods, chronic pelvic pain and in some cases, infertility. While up to two-thirds of women with endometriosis will have no issue conceiving, it is one of the most common causes of reduced fertility in women seeking help to conceive. It currently takes on average 7.5 years to diagnose endometriosis, and the underlying cause of the disease is still poorly understood. Merrion Fertility Clinic's research team recently collaborated with investigators at the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT) to examine patterns of protein glycosylation and vaginal microbiota (bacteria) in women with and without endometriosis. This study highlighted specific microbes and unique changes in glycosylation markers associated with endometriosis, that may shed light on both disease mechanism and potential future avenues for treatment. The study was published in Scientific Reports in October 2024.

### Maternal endometrial environment in infertility

Our longstanding research collaboration with Trinity College Dublin's Comparative Immunology group, led by internationally renowned immunologist Professor Cliona O'Farrelly, has focused on investigating immune cells and immune proteins in the uterine lining (endometrium) that may be disturbed in infertility. In 2024, our group published a fascinating study on IL-17 evolution from marsupials to placental mammals, and its role in embryo implantation and early pregnancy. This research study was published and selected as a featured cover in the American Journal of Reproductive Immunology, the official journal of the American Society for Reproductive Immunology.

Merrion Fertility Clinic and TCD research collaboration featured on the cover of 'American Journal of Reproductive Immunology'.



## ONGOING RESEARCH

### Impact of dietary supplements on Sperm Parameters: Proceive Study

Male fertility rates have been declining worldwide over the past few decades, even affecting young men under 30 years. Westernized countries appear to be the most affected, with deterioration in male fertility rates suggested to be attributable to diet, sedentary lifestyles and increasing rates of obesity. It is important to identify any modifiable risk factors that may contribute to the decline in male fertility, to devise interventions and optimise male health, thereby supporting fertility rates worldwide. As part of her MD research, Dr Ciara Nolan is currently conducting a study among men attending the clinic for fertility investigations. This study will investigate dietary patterns and circulating levels of hormones and inflammatory markers in men with abnormal semen analysis before and after a 12-week course of a dietary supplement called Proceive Max, which contains vitamins, minerals and amino acids to support male fertility, to look at the effect on semen analysis results.

If you are interested in learning more about our research projects, or to find out if you are eligible to participate in one of our trials, please contact us at [research@merrionfertility.ie](mailto:research@merrionfertility.ie)

### MFC Research Represented at International Conferences

In January 2024, Merrion Fertility Clinic were fortunate to have several of our multi-disciplinary team attend and present their research at the 'Fertility 2024' annual conference, jointly hosted by the Association of Reproductive & Clinical Scientists (ARCS), the British Fertility Society (BFS) and the Society for Reproduction and Fertility. The theme of the conference was 'Rethinking Reproduction', with a focus on novel research and innovative techniques aimed at improving fertility outcomes.

Three MFC researchers were invited to present their studies at the conference. This included Dr Andrew Downey and former Aspire Clinical Fellow Dr Sorca O'Brien, and Dr Sarah Petch. Dr Downey was selected to give an overview of his work in an oral presentation and was shortlisted for the British Fertility Society Early Career Clinician award.

We are so proud of our team for their excellent presentations, for their unwavering dedication to patient-centred research, and for representing Merrion Fertility Clinic on the international research stage.





# Adolescent & Young Adult (AYA) Services:

## The Childhood Cancer Fertility Project





Cancer treatment-induced infertility in young people has enormous implications for their long-term quality of life. Fertility preservation, the freezing of eggs and sperm, offers young patients the hope of establishing a family in the future, and we know that this hope can be transformative in their survivorship journey.



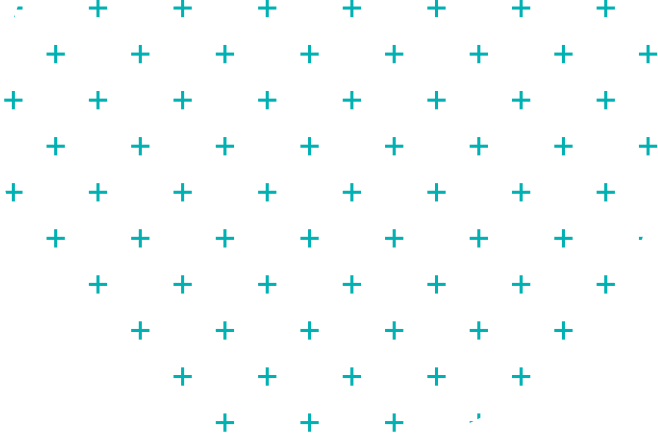
The Childhood Cancer Fertility Project, a joint initiative between Merrion Fertility Clinic (MFC) and the Irish Cancer Society (ICS), has established a national referral pathway for Fertility Preservation in Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA). This project funds sperm and egg cryopreservation prior to cancer treatment for AYA patients up to the age of 18 years, as well as fertility assessment and fertility preservation for survivors of childhood cancer currently aged between 17 and 26 years.

These services had been provided free of charge to AYA patients through a 3 year charitable funding grant from the Irish Cancer Society since 2020. In 2024, we were delighted to learn that the Irish Cancer Society have extended this charitable funding for AYA patients through 2025. However, there is still an acute and urgent need for public funding of fertility preservation services in adolescent patients under the age of 18 years.

In 2024, Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) was commissioned by the Department of Health to report on publicly funded services for fertility preservation for medical reasons worldwide, to support the development of a national fertility preservation policy for Ireland. The summary report was published in October 2024, and Merrion Fertility Clinic was cited as an organisation that contributed information regarding the Childhood Cancer Fertility Project. On November 6th

2024, HIQA invited stakeholders, including representatives from the National Women and Infant's Health Program (NWIHP), National Cancer Care Program (NCCP), Children's Health Ireland and Merrion Fertility Clinic, to a formal presentation of report findings at the Department of Health. The presentation prompted an engaging discussion, with robust support voiced by healthcare providers in AYA oncology/haematology, endocrinology and urology for a comprehensive, state-funded fertility preservation program that includes providing tissue preservation for children facing gonadotoxic treatments.

Throughout 2024, Merrion Fertility Clinic research and clinical staff continued to advocate strongly for state funding of this service and made a number of notable contributions to the development of the AYA fertility preservation program.



Dedication of AYA Counselling room

In 2024, the Irish Cancer Society donated a beautiful dedication plaque for our recently converted AYA counselling room, to acknowledge their significant support for the AYA fertility preservation program. This room, furnished in a relaxing, non-clinical style, provides a private, comfortable and welcoming space for young patients and their families attending the clinic, away from the main waiting reception areas.

April 1-5 2024: Adolescent and Young Adults (AYA) Cancer Awareness Week

In recognition of AYA Cancer Awareness week 2024, Aspire Clinical Fellow Dr. Niamh Joyce and Head of Research Dr. Louise Glover travelled to University Hospital Galway to meet with UHG healthcare staff and give a talk on AYA fertility preservation services before, during and after cancer treatment. UHG is one of several AYA regional hospitals that refer young patients to our clinic for fertility assessments and egg and sperm freezing, as part of the Childhood Cancer Fertility Project.

Merrion Fertility Clinic AYA Oncology Fertility Preservation research wins award

In May 2024, Dr Niamh Joyce presented her research on fertility preservation in male AYA patients at the British Fertility Society U.K. Fertility Preservation Conference, held in Edinburgh. The venue of the conference, the University of Edinburgh, is internationally renowned as one of the leading U.K. sites for fertility preservation, and was attended by some of the global leaders in the field. Dr Joyce's research was formally recognized with the award for Best Clinical Poster.

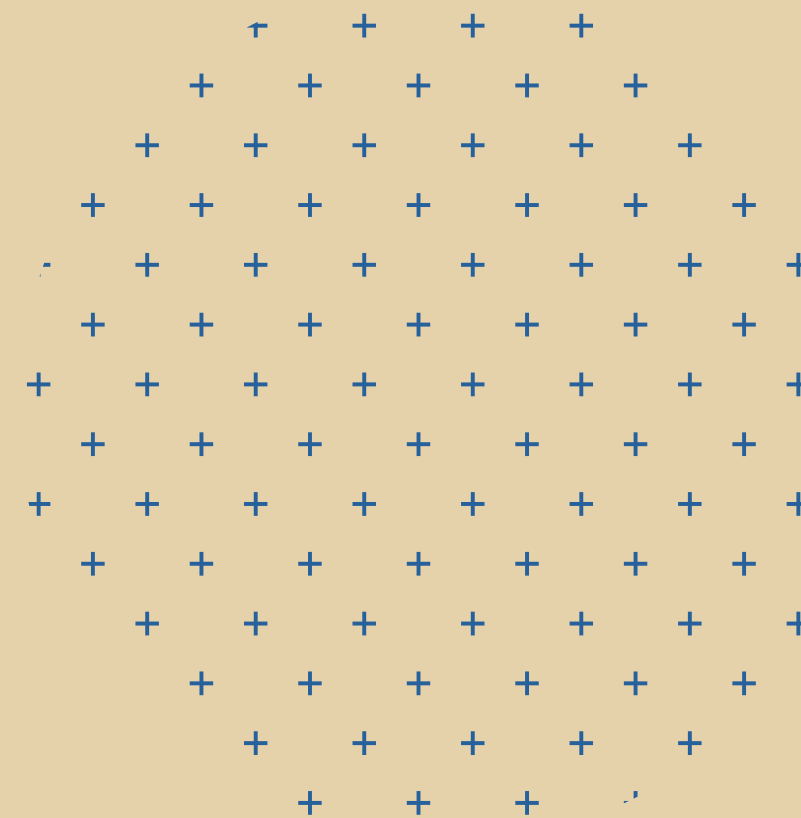
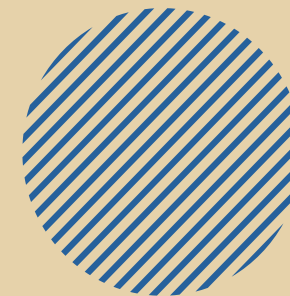
Dr Joyce was also invited to present her work at the Annual Meeting of The Irish Society of Urology (ISU) and at the Global (ES)GURS-ESAU Conference in Antwerp, Belgium. This recognition highlights the critical work being done through the clinic's AYA program, and is a reflection of the dedication and hard work of all the MFC CAYA team, who take care of these young patients and their families during an unimaginably challenging time in their lives.



Dr Niamh Joyce  
Fertility  
Specialist



# Services Launched in 2024





A priority for MFC is to ensure our patients have access to a full range of assisted reproductive services on-site and in 2024 we continued to expand this in response to demand and to where we have identified gaps in what is available to patients in Ireland.

PGT

After a successful launch of our PGT service in June 2023, our PGT service has significantly expanded to 190 biopsy cycles in 2024. This includes cycles where patients have previously frozen embryos that can be thawed and re-frozen to allow biopsy.

On-going review of our KPI's related to this service are in line with international standards and clinical pregnancy rates from the transfer of euploid embryos stands at 61%. Current projection for 2025 is to provide 250 PGT cycles.

mTESE (microdissection TEsticular Sperm Extraction)

TESE (Testicular Sperm Extraction) is a procedure where tubules from the testes are retrieved surgically and processed by the embryology team to extract and freeze sperm for future use in fertility treatment.

Merrion Fertility Clinic currently provide TESE services for suitable patients on-site and in theatre in the National Maternity Hospital. mTESE (microdissection TEsticular Sperm Extraction) involves using a surgical microscope to identify isolated areas of healthy testicular tissue where spermatogenesis is more likely to occur. This option is more appropriate for certain clinical scenarios. To date mTESE options for patients in Ireland are very limited as fertility clinics do not have the appropriate surgical equipment to perform this procedure. In 2024 MFC established links with Beacon Hospital and Consultant Urologist Dr. John Sullivan and in October HPRA approved our new mTESE service where an embryologist will be present during the procedure and transports the material back to MFC for processing and storage.

Male Factor Multi-Disciplinary Team

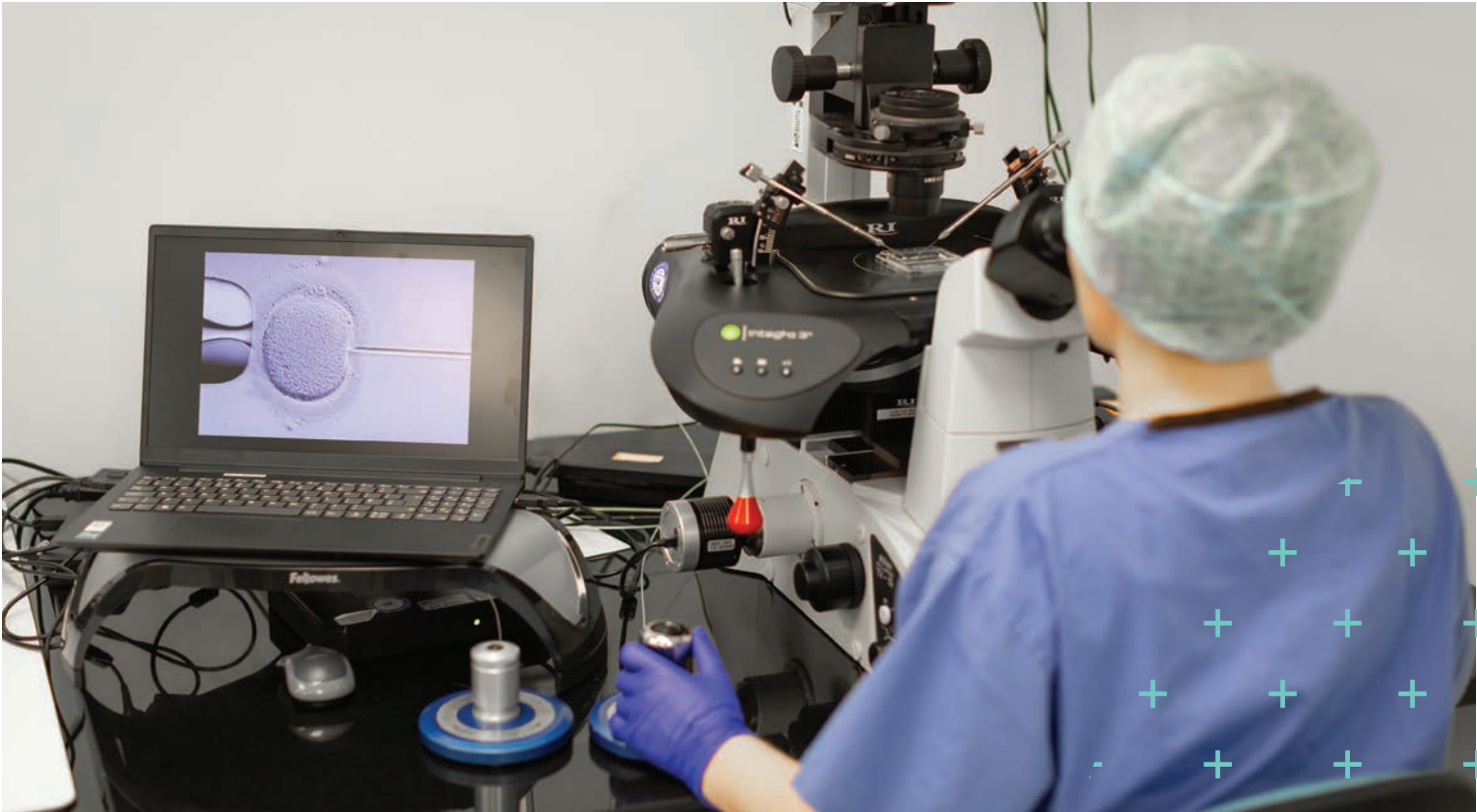
During 2024, Merrion Fertility Clinic established the first national bi-monthly multidisciplinary reproductive andrology meeting. This is attended by our reproductive medicine team and two specialist Consultant Andrologists. Patients are reviewed and may be referred for a standard surgical removal of sperm at Merrion Fertility Clinic or a specialised Micro-TESE procedure under the care of andrology.

Reciprocal IVF

Reciprocal IVF, sometimes referred to as shared motherhood, is a treatment option for female couples. Embryos are created from the eggs of one partner using IVF and donated sperm, and the second partner carries the pregnancy. This arrangement allows one partner to be a genetic parent, and the second partner, a birth mother. We obtained a licence to offer this service in the summer of 2024.

Clinical Trial: Sperm Hyaluronic Binding Selection (PICSI)

Hyaluronic acid (HA) is a major component of the cumulus complex surrounding oocytes. Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) involves injection of a selected sperm into the oocyte. Embryologists select sperm with normal morphology and progressive motility. Physiologic intracytoplasmic sperm injection (PICSI) involves sperm selection for ICSI based on hyaluronan binding. Mature sperm which bind to HA have greater genomic integrity and reduced levels of DNA fragmentation. As part of her MD research studies, Dr Sarah Petch aims to prospectively study PICSI as compared to standard ICSI in sibling oocytes to investigate if PICSI improves embryological and AHR outcomes, particularly fertilisation rate and embryo euploid status, where the female patient is aged over 35 years. Recruitment ongoing; trial is registered with ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT06602687).



# Plans for 2025

**Merrion Fertility Clinic plans to expand our services to help support more diverse, efficient and safer ways to create families. New treatments we will introduce in 2025 include an expansion of our egg donation service and further development of our mTESE service.**

## **Egg Donation**

The current egg donation programme at Merrion Fertility Clinic is limited to known donors, for example a sister who is healthy and willing to donate. In December 2024 we obtained a license to launch a new service, partnering with a European donor egg bank. This will enable those who need donor eggs to select their own donor, prioritising what is important to them in their donor and have the eggs imported to the Clinic. The eggs will be thawed, fertilised, and allowed to grow into blastocysts here in Dublin. Any additional embryos available after transfer will be frozen and stored. Egg donation can help achieve a healthy pregnancy where previous cycles with a patient's own eggs have failed, possibly due to a poor response to stimulation or previous gonadotoxic treatment such as chemotherapy.

## **Male Fertility Care**

In 2024 we successfully launched our mTESE (microdissection TESTicular Sperm Extraction) service in conjunction with Beacon Hospital and consultant Urologist, Dr. John Sullivan. In 2025 we hope to expand this service in conjunction with other hospitals and are currently exploring the possibility of government funding under the existing Assisted Human Reproduction funding with the HSE.





# Patient Journey



SINÉAD AND AMI'S JOURNEY

Choosing the Clinic

We were always aware of the Merrion Fertility Clinic before we started our journey. As both of us are nurses, it was important to us to find and avail of a not-for-profit clinic and one that also had a long history in the field. We also really liked the key ethos and focus on research the clinic carries out. Once we started thinking about starting our journey, Merrion Fertility Clinic was the first place we looked at, and we were delighted to find out they offered treatment to same-sex couples. They are also partnered with our medical insurer—VHI, so all of this combined made it feel like the right fit for us.

Treatment Process

Our journey was longer than we expected it to be, and we had two unsuccessful transfers. This was definitely the most challenging aspect for us. At any stage when we'd feel deflated that things weren't turning out as we'd hoped, we would meet with Dr Martyn or talk to the nursing team. They would always put our minds at ease and be proactive in discussing the next steps and developing a suitable plan.

Choosing our donor was a very positive experience for us. Our embryologist, Joyce, gave us great advice before we started this process. She was always at hand to answer a call and guide us in helping us choose the best fit for us.

Support

The level of support provided by each separate person in every department you deal with cannot do enough for you. Any queries we had, be they big or small, someone would always respond either via the patient portal or a phone call. We navigated some challenging times by being open with each other and sharing our fears and feelings. We also always knew that anything we felt we could openly discuss with anyone in the team at Merrion Fertility Clinic which was invaluable support to us as it is a long and emotionally taxing journey filled with a roller coaster of emotions.

Outcome

We had our third transfer on the 21st of June, 2023, and we could not quite believe it when we finally had a positive pregnancy. We were overcome initially with emotions, more fear than excitement. We constantly just kept worrying that something would happen, so we held off on telling people for a number of weeks until it really sunk in with us that we were actually pregnant. Our first scan was in Merrion Fertility Clinic, and seeing our little girl's heartbeat for the first time was the most incredible moment for us – we couldn't believe our luck.



Advice

Our advice to any same-sex couple starting their journey is to just be patient and avail of any supports offered. Link in with other couples who you may know who've gone through the journey, I think would be hugely beneficial. This was something we didn't have, and we've been so open since then to lend an ear and offer support to others we know who are starting their journey. Lean on each other during challenging times and always hold on to the dream that you will have a little baby at the end of it all, and it will all be so worth it.

Experience with the Clinic

We cannot fault Merrion Fertility Clinic in any way. The place will always hold such a special place in our hearts. It became like a second home to us for many years and we would not have our little girl without them. We would recommend the clinic to any couple seeking to start their family. The level of care, compassion, acceptance and empathy is invaluable throughout this process.

We will be forever grateful to Merrion Fertility Clinic for helping us create our family.





“  
I always felt like  
I was in good hands,  
and the staff were  
incredibly caring  
and supportive  
throughout.”

Here are some quotes from  
patients about their experience  
at Merrion Fertility Clinic:

“My partner and I have been on a fertility journey for the past four years. I chose Merrion Fertility Clinic for its strong reputation, and it proved to be the right decision. The medical team is exceptionally professional, well-organised, and communication was seamless. Their online portal made it easy to get quick responses to all my questions throughout both treatments.

Fertility treatment can be a stressful experience, but I felt completely at ease in their care. We were successful on our second attempt and are now blessed with a beautiful baby girl. I'm deeply grateful and would wholeheartedly recommend Merrion to any couple considering this journey.”

“We attended the Merrion Fertility Clinic to assess our fertility status. Although we didn't need IVF or other fertility treatments, we would highly recommend the clinic to anyone who is at the start of their family planning process.

Dr Bauman gave us great advice and support, and I am delighted to say we welcomed a beautiful baby girl last month.

We really appreciate all the staff at the Merrion Fertility Clinic for their professionalism and support.”

“Our beautiful baby boy arrived 12 days early last week to join our little family. We had been trying for our second baby for 15 months and decided to give IVF a go. As daunting as it was to consider treatment, we found the whole process quite manageable thanks to the wonderful, competent and professional staff at the Merrion.

We can't thank you enough for what you have done for us.”

“From start to finish, our journey at the Merrion Fertility Clinic was incredible. Each staff member from reception to nursing staff, laboratory staff and consultants were amazing — so helpful, kind, caring, honest and exceptional at their job. We are so grateful our treatment worked first time round. We were not forced down any path but instead guided towards evidence-based therapies which has resulted in a very positive outcome for us. We are so grateful for everything the Merrion has done for us.”

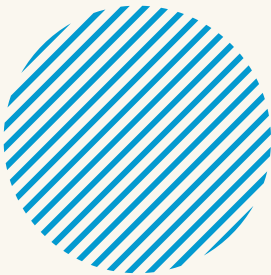
“I recently completed my fertility journey with Merrion Fertility Clinic, and I can't recommend them highly enough. From the initial consultation to the final stages, the entire process was incredibly transparent and efficient. I always felt like I was in good hands, and the staff were incredibly caring and supportive throughout. They took the time to answer all my questions and address any concerns I had, which made me feel comfortable and confident in their expertise.

If you're looking for a fertility clinic that prioritises patient care and transparency, look no further than Merrion Fertility Clinic.”

At Merrion Fertility Clinic, we understand that facing fertility challenges can be tough, emotionally, physically and financially. Our commitment to patient care extends beyond medical treatment; we are dedicated to providing holistic support that addresses the emotional, social, and nutritional aspects of the fertility journey.



“  
Psychosexual therapy is a wonderful, specialised option to seek out a place of empathy and specialised knowledge to cater for the sexual issue at hand.



Fertility Counselling

At Merrion Fertility Clinic, we recognise that fertility treatment can present not only medical challenges but also emotional and psychological ones. Providing access to qualified fertility counsellors is an important part of our commitment to holistic patient care.

Fertility treatment often involves complex decisions and unexpected outcomes. It's not uncommon for patients to experience a wide range of emotions during this time, such as anger, shame, guilt, powerlessness, or despair, when things don't go as planned. These feelings can sometimes impact relationships and communication with partners, family members, or friends.

Our counsellors are available to support individuals and couples as they navigate the emotional aspects of fertility care. Whether managing the stress of treatment, exploring different options, or seeking clarity around decision-making, counselling offers a structured and confidential space for reflection and support.

By incorporating counselling into the fertility journey, we aim to help patients feel more informed, supported, and confident in the choices they make. At Merrion Fertility Clinic, we are committed to delivering comprehensive care that supports both the physical and emotional well-being of our patients.

Psychosexual Therapy

In 2024, Merrion Fertility Clinic, in recognition of the need, introduced a new psychosexual therapist, Corinne Henry-Bezy, to our support service. Corinne is a Psychosexual Therapist based in Dublin. She originally trained as a general Nurse and has experience working in respiratory, renal, and emergency units. Corinne earned her Postgraduate Diploma in Psychosexual Therapy from the University of Central Lancashire. She is now a member of The College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists register.

In her own words, Corinne describes what her work, and Merrion Fertility Clinic, means to her.

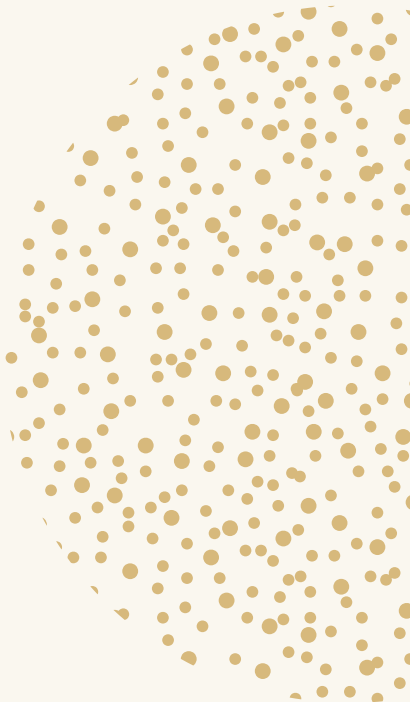
“My role as a Psychosexual Therapist is an extremely privileged one. I work with individuals and couples experiencing sexual difficulties. Most of my work navigates issues such as vaginismus, pain during sex, lack of sexual enjoyment and erectile dysfunction. This past year, I am delighted to have been a part of the support network that Merrion Fertility Clinic offers to its patients.

With or without experiencing a fertility challenge, sexual issues are still common both in Ireland and across the globe. Experiencing fertility challenges can sometimes change the enjoyment of sex for a couple or individual. As a result, it is normal for difficulties within relationships and sexual intimacy to occur during or because of fertility treatment. Psychosexual therapy is a wonderful, specialised option to seek out a place of empathy and specialised knowledge to cater for the sexual issue at hand.

The first-hand advocacy for patient well-being at Merrion Fertility Clinic is outstanding and I am truly grateful to be a part of an establishment that offers a holistic approach to couples and individuals.”



Corinne  
Henry-Bezy  
Psychosexual  
Therapist





# Patient Charter



As we mark twenty seven years of compassionate, expert fertility care, one theme has emerged again and again, —strong communication is at the heart of supporting our patients. In 2024, we proudly introduced our first Patient Charter, outlining the level of care and service they can expect when they walk through our doors.

This document sets out our promise to our patients, It also outlines how patients can actively participate in their own care, creating a two-way partnership built on trust and respect.

Orla O’Leary,  
Head of Patient  
Experience



By sharing our Patient Charter with new patients, we’re not only welcoming them to our clinic but also demonstrating our dedication to their care and ensuring a positive experience right from the start.

Here’s why having a Patient Charter is so important:

Clear Expectations →

It lays out clear expectations for both staff and patients regarding the quality of care, communication, and overall experience at our clinic.

Transparency →

Transparency is key in building trust. The charter openly communicates our values, mission, and the standards we hold ourselves to. This transparency helps foster a stronger connection with our patients.

Accountability →

It holds us accountable. Having our commitments in writing serves as a constant reminder to always strive for excellence in everything we do.

Empowerment →

A Patient Charter empowers patients by giving them a voice. It lets them know that their feedback matters and that we’re dedicated to continuously improving our services based on their input.





# Merrion Fertility Foundation

Established in 2012, the Merrion Fertility Foundation is dedicated to supporting individuals who face financial barriers to accessing fertility treatment. Patients of Merrion Fertility Clinic and those attending fertility clinics at the National Maternity Hospital can apply for financial support.

Applications to the Foundation are reviewed by a team of experienced staff with different fields of expertise. They include Dr. Renato Bauman, Medical Director; Georgina Kearney, Chief Operating Officer; Dr. Fiona Martyn, Consultant at both Merrion Fertility Clinic and the National Maternity Hospital; and Laura Harrington, Head Medical Social Worker at the National Maternity Hospital.

Both medical and financial criteria are assessed when the committee meets to review applications to the Foundation. Mindful of the implications of time delay on fertility care, the committee meets every three months.

The foundation was delighted to see the introduction of public funding for fertility treatment in Ireland in 2023. Though very welcome, this funding has not yet removed the financial barrier for all those who need it. Some examples include fertility preservation or fertility treatments requiring donated eggs or sperm.

As approved criteria for public funding expand, the committee of Merrion Fertility Foundation will continue to review the accessibility of fertility treatments in Ireland and address any ongoing barriers.

**In 2024, Merrion Fertility Foundation contributed to the cost of fertility treatment for nineteen patients, to a total of €60,199.50.**

MFC staff join VHI Women's Mini Marathon to support Merrion Fertility Foundation.



