

Fertility Network UK: raising awareness of male infertility



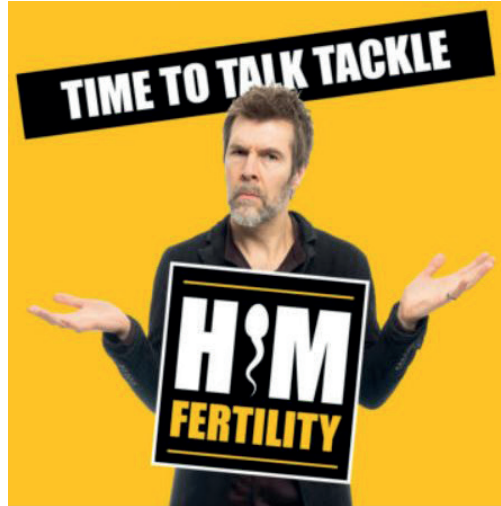
Fertility Network UK are reaching out to clinicians in the urology field to raise awareness of the need to support men as the diagnosis of infertility on their emotional wellbeing and mental health can be devastating. This lack of support prompted the comedian Rhod Gilbert to raise this issue to encourage men to talk about fertility problems and signpost them and their partners to much-needed support.

While fertility is as much about a man as a woman, men often receive far less support throughout treatment. Fertility treatment can be a gruelling process for couples, and it can have a huge effect on men too. Many men feel isolated during fertility treatment and often feel like a spare part as treatment is heavily focused on the woman. There is a lack of support for men around lifestyle, diet and stress, and it can be more difficult for men to find a space to talk about their personal challenges. For some men, this can lead to serious mental health issues, depression and even suicidal thoughts.

A 2020 survey for male patients conducted by Fertility Network UK found that:

- 79% of men felt that fertility challenges have impacted their mental health
- 42% of respondents who went through treatment did not feel fully involved alongside their partner
- 41% did not feel supported by family and friends
- 48% indicated that their work life had been impacted by fertility issues
- 95% of men wanted to see more support made available for them.

Rhod released his documentary *Stand Up to Infertility* alongside the launch of the HIMfertility campaign. After he and his wife discovered that they both had fertility challenges and would require IVF treatment, Rhod realised that there was a real lack of support for men. HIMfertility has now found a new home with Fertility Network UK. Although the charity had been successfully supporting men via monthly meet ups on Zoom from the start of lockdown co-hosted



Comedian Rhod Gilbert is encouraging men to 'talk tackle'.

by our ambassadors Toby Trice and Ian Stones, it doubled in size after the merge with HIMfertility. The transition to a full support group was the perfect next step.

The HIMfertility group is a private Facebook group, meaning the content can only be viewed by members. All men are invited to join, whether they have experienced infertility issues personally or are supporting a partner through infertility. This is a space just for men, where members can talk and ask questions any time, and stay up-to-date with monthly meetings now co-hosted by Rhod, Toby and Ian.

The group not only meet to support each other they continue to campaign to raise awareness. In March 2022 a team of men from the HIMfertility Support

Group climbed to Everest Base Camp. However, not everyone needs to become so actively involved and might just need the group to meet other men on a similar journey, sharing the rollercoaster highs and lows of a fertility journey.

Rhod Gilbert commented: "While making the documentary, we set up in a shopping centre in Cardiff, and invited men to come and talk about their fertility. I didn't think it would be easy to ask strangers to 'talk tackle', but I didn't realise exactly how hard it would be – and that's a real problem. Sadly, it's a pretty common experience, and that's why we have HIMfertility – to educate men on what affects their fertility, encourage men to speak up without fear, and ultimately make sure they're getting the right support. It's been a pleasure to co-host a monthly Zoom group with Fertility Network, and see the online group grow on Facebook. We started off with a handful of men opening up for the first time on our documentary, and now we have hundreds of men able to access peer support online"

Fertility Network UK ask anyone experiencing fertility issues to reach out to us and for men to know there is a safe space for them to share their fears and get the support they need.



<https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/himfertility/>