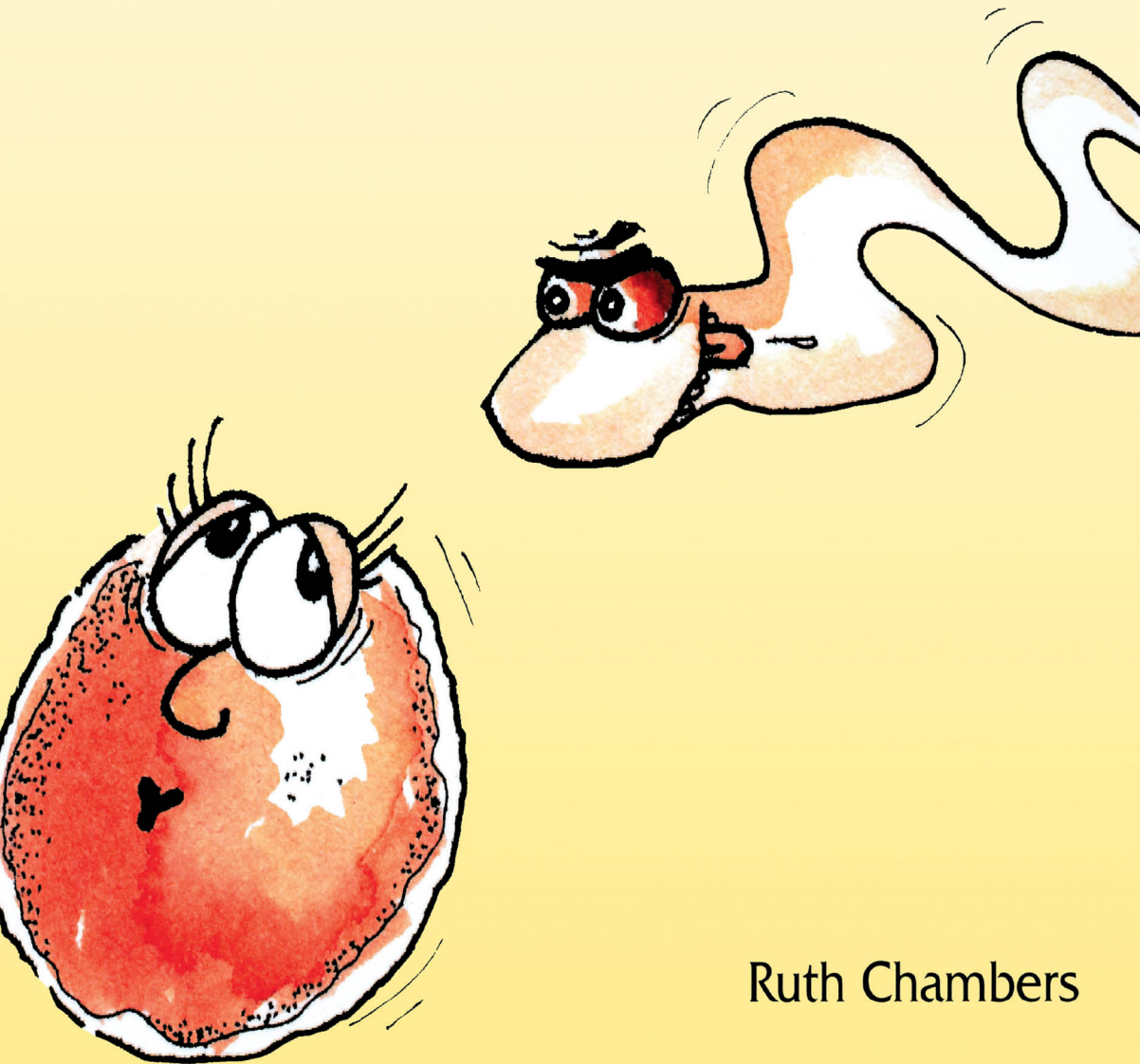


# Fertility Problems

a simple guide



Ruth Chambers



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## ► PREFACE

Patients want simple, clear information about the options, risks and implications of infertility treatment when they are feeling emotional at a vulnerable stage of their lives. They often ask their doctors for explanations and advice about their feelings and experiences of treatment. GPs and hospital doctors in turn need clear unambiguous information about best practice in a complex field, to be able to explain and discuss the complicated medical management and ethical dilemmas that face their patients who are seeking assistance for their infertility.

The book was 'conceived' by Ruth Chambers during her recent term as a member of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. Having been a GP for 18 years and caring for many patients with infertility problems, she is aware of how difficult it is for patients and doctors to keep abreast of all the new and complex developments in fertility treatment. Patients need to understand and think through the issues to be able to fully participate in the decisions made about their care.

It is really important for the welfare of the child-to-be and the would-be parents, that general practitioners work closely with fertility experts to provide seamless care for infertile couples. Some GPs shy away from the seeming complexities of fertility treatments and are reluctant to contribute to the assessment of couples' suitability as prospective parents. Clear and specific information should enable health professionals and patients alike to understand the complicated medical and ethical situations that are integral to the management of those with infertility and participate more fully in decisions about their care.

This book seeks to describe current thinking and best practice in the management of infertility in such a way that those doctors, other health professionals or patients who are new to the field can appreciate the key issues and concerns. It draws heavily on the publications from the Human Fertilisation and



Embryology Authority and the evidence-based clinical guidelines on the management of infertility recently published by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists which were supported by the clinical effectiveness programme of the NHS Executive.

Guidelines are raining down on GPs' heads from all directions, some offering conflicting advice, others complicated instructions. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' guidelines<sup>1,2</sup> give the evidence for best practice in managing infertility in primary and secondary care settings. They have been developed by a multidisciplinary group including GPs, nurses and users as well as fertility experts, overseeing a dedicated research team undertaking systematic reviews of the literature on the topic. The draft guidelines were peer reviewed by a variety of health professionals and patients, and amended accordingly. The resulting national guidelines are intended to be adapted to local circumstances and used for commissioning high quality infertility care. For simplicity the main guidelines, reviews and reports will be referred to in support of the information given here, rather than the references being given to the hundreds of individual published research papers that they considered. The guidelines<sup>1,2</sup> themselves are graded according to how robust the evidence cited is, and whether statements are scientifically proven, are backed by good research or are the opinion of experts in the field.

We know that GPs who use infertility guidelines are more likely to undertake a more comprehensive work-up prior to referral including seeing and examining both partners, initiating basic investigations and speeding up the referral process.<sup>3</sup>

Ruth Chambers  
*April 1999*

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