

Sharing time-lapse videos with IVF patients

Research insights to support best practice in fertility care

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Research Insights #1

Many IVF clinics share time-lapse videos of developing embryos with their fertility patients. However, patients often receive little information about what the videos show, which can leave them with unanswered questions about what the video means for their IVF treatment and may intensify the emotional burden of an already trying experience.

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Time-lapse videos: understanding the experience for IVF patients

Time-lapse incubators allow fertility professionals to take a series of pictures of embryos during their first days of development. This enables IVF clinics to monitor the development of the embryos without having to remove them from the safety of the incubator. The images can also be used by clinics to produce short videos of an embryo's development.

It is increasingly common for clinics to share these time-lapse videos with patients. Until now, little was known about how these videos are received and interpreted by IVF patients. Our research has generated vital new knowledge.



Insights from our research will help clinics improve the IVF experience for patients.

Research overview

For this research we used qualitative methods to explore the introduction of new biomedical technologies in IVF treatment and the implications for IVF patients and professionals in the UK.

- Interviews with **51 IVF patients** and **43 fertility professionals**.
- **Six focus groups** with **17 IVF patients** and **18 fertility professionals**.
- An **online survey** with **314 IVF patients**.
- More than **250 hours of ethnographic observation** at **six fertility clinics**.
- In-depth **analysis of policy documents and professional statements**.

Recommendations

1

Assess when to share videos. Fertility clinics should assess when and where to share time-lapse videos of embryos with IVF patients to avoid increasing the emotional difficulty of an already emotionally charged experience. In particular, clinics should avoid offering videos to patients at the point of embryo transfer. It might be best for clinics to wait until patients know the outcome of their IVF treatment.

2

Provide patients with appropriate information. Clinics should provide patients with carefully curated information before watching videos. These materials should explain what the videos show and outline the risks associated with watching them at different stages during IVF treatment. This will enable patients to make an informed decision about whether and when to watch the videos.

3

Develop best practice guidelines. Professional bodies should consider developing guidelines on best practices for sharing time-lapse videos. This will help fertility clinics to mitigate the potential negative consequences of viewing videos and improve the quality of experience for IVF patients.

Sharing videos with patients: the risks of causing distress

Our research showed that most patients liked watching videos of their developing embryos and saw them as a meaningful record of their IVF treatment. However, even among this group, many patients reported feeling uncertain about the video content. Patients know the videos contain important information about their embryo and their chances of achieving a pregnancy, but they lack explanations or opportunities to ask professionals questions.

Sharing these videos with patients, particularly during the two-week wait for pregnancy test results, can cause additional distress to an already emotional experience. If their IVF treatment fails, patients may struggle with emotional attachments to the content of the embryo videos, making coping even more challenging.

When should videos be shared

Our research shows that the **timing** and **location** in which patients receive and watch their videos can have a significant impact on their treatment experience.

Responding to these findings, fertility professionals and IVF patients recommended that:

- videos should not be shared with patients at the embryo transfer stage
- clinics should wait until after patients know the outcome of their IVF treatment
- even in unsuccessful cycles, patients should be able to see the videos, if they ask for them



I think [having the time-lapse video] was almost a curse because I was looking at other videos online and seeing what the outcomes were and comparing them to our video [...] and obviously I don't know anything about it whatsoever.

IVF patient

Provide the right information



Fertility professionals and patients agreed that if videos are watched outside the clinic, **patients should be prepared**. There were differing views on how this should be achieved.

- Some professionals consider that it is important to provide detailed information on the videos, including what they show and how they will be used by the fertility clinic.
- Others believe that clinics should think carefully about what information is appropriate to share with patients.
- All professionals should be cautious about overwhelming patients with information.

Empower patients to make an informed choice

Professionals should inform patients about the potential implications of watching the videos, drawing from other patients' experiences, and recognising different needs. This will empower patients to make an informed choice about whether and when to watch the videos.



You're like looking at [the video] thinking is that, is that good? I don't know, you know. Because you don't really know what you're looking at.

IVF patient

Underpinning research

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