

Newsletter

Publication of the National Infertility Support and Information Group



Dear Members and Readers

ISSUE 68 | **Winter 2018**

As 2018 ends and we bring you the year's final edition of the newsletter, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee, employees, facilitators and members who have given freely of their time to ensure that the activities of NISIG have continued throughout 2018.

I'd also like to thank our main sponsor, Merck Group, our sponsor clinics, HSE South and the Hospital Saturday Fund for their continued support. Finally, thanks to our newest sponsors, PKHL Solicitors, Circle Surrogacy and StillMind for their sponsorship in 2018. We couldn't continue the important work of NISIG without this support.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the contributors of the newsletter over the past twelve months, including clinicians and others who have sent us updates and personal stories. If you have a story you would like to share with us in 2019, please let us know.

We have had a busy year within NISIG, including committee and staff changes, new sponsors and partnering with the National Women's Council of Ireland.

I am excited to announce that the next Family Conversations: Donor Talks event will take place on February 3rd, in Dublin. We know from feedback on the first

event, that those in attendance found it a wonderful opportunity to hear from others on the topic of discussing donor origins within the family. We hope to bring more events like this to you in the future. Please keep an eye on the website for details.

As a member organisation we always endeavour to ensure that our activities reflect our members' vision for NISIG. However, to do that we need to increase member participation. There are a variety of ways members can help - as facilitators, at committee level and by fundraising, for example. I would like to ask members to consider becoming involved. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Knowing that this can be a difficult time of year for many, please remember to be kind to yourselves. Those who are struggling with infertility can find the holidays an extremely difficult and isolating time, with the focus on families and children. We have included some insight on the holidays from within NISIG that we hope will be helpful. And remember that the helpline - 087 7975058 - is always there for you.

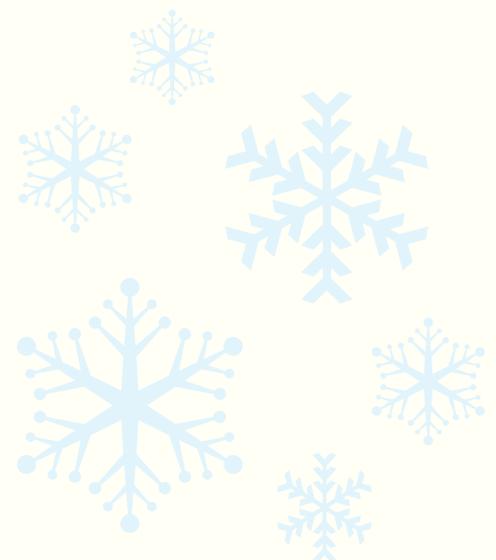
Finally, I would like to wish all our members, volunteers, sponsors and

community partners a peaceful Christmas and health and happiness for 2019.



NISIG needs you...

Has NISIG helped you on the journey? Would you like to be a part of what we do? Can you help facilitate meetings? Do you have experience you'd like to share? We want to hear from you! Please contact us at nisigireland@gmail.com.



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Thoughts on the Holiday Season, from NISIG

I remember the absolute BEST Christmas during the eight years it took my partner and I to finally start a family. It was our NON-Christmas. We cancelled Christmas the year before our son was born... it just wasn't working for us!

We had spent several Christmases utterly miserable, either sick of our (avoided) friends' family photo cards and yearly family newsletters, or else mourning the loss of yet another baby after a failed cycle.

Sitting across from my in-laws at the festive Christmas dinner table for yet another holiday meal, recognising the empty look on their faces as a mere reflection of ours, just wasn't high on our priority list. My husband is an only child, so Christmas day with his family had become a quiet, empty and sad end to every infertile year.

So, that year, we packed our bags with beach towels and sun cream and headed off to Spain. We spent long afternoons on the beach, reading, or sleeping... and enjoyed long leisurely walks and lunches. There were no Christmas carols, no cards, no snow... and most importantly, we enjoyed each other during a time of year when you are meant to cherish family time.

There was no pressure to put on a happy face, no social commitments hanging over us, creating tension for weeks beforehand... we simply did as we pleased, relaxed and enjoyed ourselves... The way everyone should at Christmastime.

Now that we are a family of three, we are overwhelmed with the happiness that the holidays bring. It's a different world when there are children in it... and we are blessed to celebrate now as parents.

But I remember the grief and the undeniable loneliness of the holidays as a childless couple. And, I want to say to others who are in pain that it's okay to not want to celebrate. It's okay to want to hop a plane and cancel Christmas. It's okay to spend your Christmas in any way that brings you peace and joy.

So, forget about obligations. Partake in social events that you look forward to and skip the ones that make you feel bad. Pamper yourself. You deserve a little TLC, or a lot! Schedule a spa day, or a weekend away. Find time to unwind.

Enjoy the little things. Reflect on what makes Christmas special for you and try to incorporate those things into your holiday. Indulge a little. Fertility enhancing life-style regimes often mean giving up some of the things that make the holidays so special. A glass of wine or two won't undo months of discipline.

Go easy on yourself. Recognise that infertility is painful and that you might not feel happy all the time. Keep your plans flexible and don't feel guilty for putting yourself first.

For years, on my fertility journey, I had allowed myself to attend occasions that I knew would have a devastating effect on me during the Christmas period. I was surrounded by babies and children and people would look at me with pity!! How that hurt!!!

Eventually, I became strong and decided to protect myself during this period, but this took time and courage. One Christmas, we went away (delighted I did it, but it's not for me). Now we spend it at home and enjoy our walks and lazy days!

On a few occasions, I helped serve Christmas dinner to homeless people and families. It honestly put everything into perspective for me.

Have the courage to say that you and your partner would like to have Christmas dinner together and that you would still love to visit, but for a short period. Do things that have a positive effect on your well-being; go for a walk, curl up on the couch and watch TV, listen to your favourite music or read a book. Pamper yourself. Also, give yourself permission to acknowledge your emotions: grief, anger, bitterness, jealousy. These are natural human feelings.

Spend time with your partner and acknowledge your sadness, emptiness and loss. But also recognise the difficulties that you have overcome together and how you have grown, both as individuals and as a couple. Couples who have travelled this road often communicate at a deeper level and more effectively than couples to whom life may have been kinder. Stay in touch with other friends with fertility issues. They may welcome the contact at this difficult time. They are in the same position and can understand and offer support that perhaps family can't. For

many this period can be very difficult, so I would encourage you to be kind and gentle with yourself and your partner

Before having my son, we went through a few difficult years where I felt the challenges of failed treatments hit us as a couple particularly hard over Christmas. One year was very tough, with a missed miscarriage, a failed IUI that autumn and a failed OE IVF cycle just before Christmas – and all of this on top of the sudden death of my favourite uncle and leaving a job after 13 years!

As you can imagine, I wasn't really in a very festive mood and was just looking to get through Christmas. What got me through was a great set of friends who also didn't have children, so no judgement or feeling of exclusion, but loads of fun and wine during our few days away.

Christmas while in the throes of fertility treatment was especially tough and I had the added hurt of no longer having my mother around. The fact that I was now motherless and seemed unable to become a mother made me feel like the one lonely and separated connector in a now broken chain. Two Christmases stand out. In the first, I had undergone my first failed IVF cycle and was in the process of a FET. I found out this too had failed and to add insult to injury the resulting period arrived on Christmas Day. I recollect saying to my Dad simply that the cycle had failed. He said he was sorry, and I agreed to his offer to prepare his traditional hot whiskey for me. The following Christmas, one missed miscarriage endured, another failed IVF cycle in a new clinic, and yet again nothing to show by year's end. By this stage several friends and contacts I had shared my fertility journey with had given birth or were pregnant. I felt so truly alone. I kept social engagements to a minimum and just took some quiet time to be with my partner, write my private blog and keep in touch with understanding friends and family. People often use war terminology when speaking about infertility, we are 'battling', we are 'in the trenches' and so forth. Equally to fight our emotional battle we need an arsenal of tips and tricks to carry us through at Christmas and New Year. So instead of the 12 Days of Christmas I offer my..

12 Tips for Coping with Christmas and New Year.

1. Agree to social events if you can cope with them.
2. Enjoy the food and drink, especially the wine and chocolate.
3. Give yourself permission to be sad.

If you need to cry, then cry.

4. Give yourself permission to be angry. I always found a vigorous carrot chopping session good for pent up rage!

5. Shop online if the crowds, noise and lights are jarring.

6. Write or journal your feelings.

7. Get out into nature – a walk, run, cycle, whatever feels comfortable. The sun will always rise.

8. If you have pets or your extended family does, embrace them and take comfort in their loving trust.

9. Start a gratitude journal and note 3 things daily you are thankful for - anything at all.

10. Watch your favourite films and lots and lots of comedy.

11. Use streaming services such as Netflix or players for programmes if you want to avoid the cheesy 'perfect family' ads.

12. Reach out to sympathetic friends, family and contacts and remember that Nisig is always here for you.

Names with NISIG

POE KIELY HOGAN LANIGAN FERTILITY LAW IRELAND



Becoming a Mother After Cancer is Possible

October was Breast Cancer Awareness Month and our clinics went pink as a message of hope: It is possible to become a mother after overcoming cancer.

The incidence of cancer in young people is increasing but so are treatments that cure it. Currently, 85% of people under 50 years of age beat cancer.

However, despite the advances, when cancer is diagnosed, it is often forgotten that, in the future, when the illness is cured, women could want to become mothers and the focus is set on the risks of recurrence of the illness during pregnancy.

Increasingly, women must win two battles: the first one against cancer and the second one against the obstacles put in place by medical teams and their environment, which tend to insist on not taking any risks because of a pregnancy.

At Institut Marquès, we have been sending out the message to the scientific community not to say “no as a rule” to women with a history of cancer who wish to have a baby.

This is so frequent that we receive many patients in our Oncology and Reproduction Unit. From the total amount of women that ask for our advice, treatment is approved in 91% of the cases and the pregnancy rate is very high: 82% of our patients have a baby. Our experience shows that if a previous evaluation approves it, risks are simply the ones involved in pregnancy.

Therefore, we want to ask these warrior women not to give up. There is nothing more rewarding than contributing to the personal stories of women, after very hard vital experiences, overcoming obstacles to become mothers.

For more information:

Web: <https://www.institutmarques.ie/>

E-mail: info@institutomarques.com

Institut Marquès Dublin: Suite 1, The Mall, Beacon Court, Sandyford, D18 PV34 / Tel. 019 026 606



Poe Kiely Hogan Lanigan are pleased to announce that, due to queries we have received and demand we are experiencing, we have expanded our service to include advice in the following areas:

- The Welfare of the Child/Best Interest of the Child, always the priority in fertility matters
- Information regarding fertility services in Ireland
- Information/referrals to counselling services
- International surrogacy agreements which fall outside of the forthcoming legislation (i.e. transnational surrogacy)
- Legal, social and ethical issues associated with assisted human reproduction
- Family law implications of Assisted Human Reproduction
- Assisted human reproduction and succession rights
- Fertility law and the LGBT community
- Ownership and use of gametes
- Agreements and issues surrounding surplus embryos (created through IVF)
- The rights of children ‘to know’ the identity of their parents, including their biological/genetic father in cases where sperm donors have been used
- Donation of embryos
- Issues regarding egg donation
- Cryopreservation (freezing) of embryos
- Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD)
- Preconception sex selection
- The ‘child’ in utero
- Adoption

If you have any queries about the matters listed above or would like to talk to us, please contact us:

Annette Hickey – 056 7721063 email: ahickey@pkhl.ie

Ger Fahy – 056 7721063 email: gfahy@pkhl.ie

SURROGACY and FERTILITY LAW LEGAL ADVICE CLINICS

As part of our commitment to providing advice and guidance to those pursuing surrogacy and those with queries and concerns about fertility law, we are delighted to announce that we are holding legal advice clinics at difference locations throughout the country where you can arrange a confidential consultation in advance with us.

These 45-minute consultations require no financial obligation and offer the opportunity to ask the questions that matter to you about surrogacy and any fertility law issue. We will give you the information and advice you need so that you can make a clear decision on your next step.

Our next clinic will be at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Ditchley House, Castleview, Little Island, Co. Cork on Wednesday the 12th of December from 3.00pm to 8.00pm. Our first clinic in 2019 will take place in early February in Galway City.

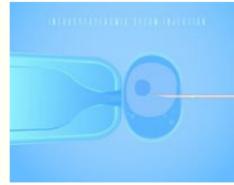
If you have queries regarding surrogacy or fertility law, or would like to arrange an appointment with us in our office, via Skype/ Zoom or one of our clinics, please contact us at:

Anette Hickey, Solicitor; ahickey@pkhl.ie

Tel: 056 7721063

Ger Fahy, Legal Executive; gfahy@pkhl.ie

Tel: 056 7721063



A Message of Hope for Men Diagnosed with Azoospermia

In October 2016, I was diagnosed with Non-Obstructive Azoospermia by local doctors in Doha, Qatar where I was living and working with my wife. The diagnosis was based on sperm analysis showing zeros across the board - zero motility, zero count, zero concentration. Pus cells, erythrocytes and spermatogenic cells all nil. Further tests at other clinics yielded the same results. My hormone analysis showed very high levels of FSH and LH, low levels of oestradiol, and testosterone in the lower end of the normal range. My wife and I, only married two months previously, were completely devastated.

A well-respected male urologist in Doha advised me to have TESA aspiration as soon as possible and prescribed me Clomid. Not wanting to jump into anything too soon, we did some further research and came across a surgeon in South Africa, my wife's home country, who specialises in male infertility and sperm retrieval procedures.

After an initial consultation, I was advised not to undergo TESA, as it was clear from my hormone analysis that such a procedure would yield negative results and only result in unnecessary trauma to the testes. It was also advised that Clomid would yield no benefit as it only increases FSH levels. The conclusion was that MicroTESE surgery provided the best hope of finding viable sperm.

We decided that MicroTESE was our best chance and so we started researching ways to best prepare our

bodies for my surgery and for the ICSI procedure. After spending much time researching online, and on the advice of some friends, we eliminated sugar and alcohol from our diets (except for some fruit and a glass of wine or two on special occasions) and also started seeing a reflexologist once a week. I began taking Vitamins A, B, C, D, and E, Zinc, L-Carnitine, GNLD Male Herbal Complex, Maca Powder (in smoothies) and Moringa daily. I did not take any prescription medication at all.

In April 2017, we travelled to Cape Town and I had my first MicroTESE procedure. The surgery was successful in that they retrieved six straws of viable sperm. The straws were frozen overnight to be used for the ICSI procedure. Only one straw survived the thawing process and, due to the poor quality of the sperm, we were only able to fertilise one embryo. The ICSI procedure went as planned but, unfortunately, we received a negative pregnancy test shortly after.

My hormone levels took quite a hit after the surgery, especially my testosterone, but returned to their previous levels after around 3 months - FSH and LH were still extremely high. At this point, my surgeon advised that I give my body another nine months before considering a second MicroTESE surgery. I continued to take the vitamins and herbal supplements. We also came across research into the effects of gluten on infertility, and so we cut out gluten from our diets along with sugar and alcohol.

In April 2018, we travelled to Cape Town again for our second round of MicroTESE and ICSI. This time, we planned to fertilise the egg on the same day as sperm retrieval. My surgery yielded similar results to the previous year, and there was enough viable sperm to fertilise 2 embryos which were transferred. Shortly after, we did a home pregnancy test which was positive and was then confirmed a few days later through blood analysis. Suffice to say we were over the moon!

We have since moved to Vietnam, but we are now into the third trimester and our doctors here are happy with how everything is progressing. We obviously have some way still to go but it's hard to believe that two years previously we were devastated by the sperm analysis with line after line of zeros. It is testament to the work of our doctors, our amazing reflexologist, and the lifestyle changes that we made in preparation for the procedures.

If anyone would like further information, my contact details are with NISIG.



Still Mind

It is estimated that one in six couples are now struggling to have a child in Ireland. When we think of infertility, we think of it as a physical condition whether the reasons are unexplained or not. The reality of infertility is that it is very much an emotional and mental condition as well. This fact can get lost in the discussions and the questions couples are subject to in their family and work and peer groups.

Stress, couples are told, plays a huge part in the success of fertility treatments. Try their best, it's very difficult not to stress over such a big life issue as a fertility treatment and whether it'll be effective. They mull over it again and again and lose sleep with the eternal What ifs? What if nots? Suppose never? That's before you even consider the financial implications and the stressful impact on the sexual relationship of the couple.

Then there is the mystery of the physical, what's wrong with my body? Why isn't it doing what it's supposed to? How come everybody else manages it? Add all that to the shame, despair and isolation felt inside.

For these couples, starting a family is beyond their control. Despite advances in modern medicine, there are no guaranteed miracle cures.

The best we can hope for is to find methods of self-care which promote optimum emotional, mental and physical health to get couples through the infertility process. Yoga, Pilates, Mindfulness and Meditation offer some support to struggling couples. These disciplines provide attendees with an opportunity to reconnect with the physical body which they may feel has been failing them and to come back into greater contact with their thought processes and minds through the breath.

I discovered the benefits of meditation during a particularly stressful family time in or around 2003. My husband and I had tried Clomid (no joy), IVF - ongoing and costly on our relationship, my body and our bank balance. We were also in the process of foreign adoption with the HSE. I was struggling with insomnia for the duration and my brain was humming most of the time. It delighted in a few moments of complete switch off. The switch off was a simple body-scan burned onto a cd. I wore it out.

Searching about, I discovered there were many practices and many techniques to choose from, I just had to find one that suited me and my lifestyle.

My father became terminally ill and I became very angry at the thought of all the effort I was putting in to conceive whilst I was losing my best pal. It was during this time that I discovered a chanting practice, the vibrations from which helped release some of the

frustration and powerlessness I felt over my family situation as I watched him slip away.

During my yoga teacher trainings, I was introduced to many meditation practices and continued to explore this area off my mat, online and in new venues.

For me, I found that much of the techniques and learnings were constantly being unlearned to internalise into something I could authentically practice at home and transmit in my classes.

Modern life is becoming increasingly frantic and anxiety and depression are on the rise. As a society, we have become permanently 'switched on'. More than ever, we need time out just for a few moments of a daily time out.

We also need a space or a means to practice meditation, without fear of getting it wrong, not meditating right or engaging in a battle with our own minds.

Still Mind TM is a collection of my meditation experiences and observations to encourage people towards an acceptance of the busy mind. It aims to help them find a connection with their breath and move towards peace of mind.

Still Mind TM is available now on Google Play with Guest and Member Options.

From my heart to yours,

Grainne Toher

www.stillmindapp.com

DCNI 2019 Meeting and Event Dates

Donor Conception Network Ireland have shared their 2019 meeting and event dates, listed below.

You can email DCNI directly at ireland.dcnetwork@gmail.com to register. Don't forget to mention being a NISIG member, as you can avail of member rates at their meetings and events.

Adult only meetings	Family days out	
*April 7	Jan 13	Mr. B's Arcade in Nutgrove Shopping Centre
*October 13	June 15	Venue TBD
	August 18	Venue TBD
	November 9	Venue TBD

***typically held in Malahide Castle and Gardens Visitor Centre, but please check venue when registering**

NISIG Sponsors 2019



Facebook & Twitter
Are you on Facebook or Twitter?
Like and follow us, on Facebook at
<https://www.facebook.com/NISIGireland>
and Twitter @NISIG1.



NISIG Meetings throughout Ireland

Cork 2019 – Support Meeting

Venue: SMA Parish
Community Hall, Wilton, Cork,
from 8pm – 10pm
Friday 8th February
– informal meeting
Friday, 5th April
– informal meeting

Dublin 2019 – Support Meeting

Venue: Dublin Airport Hilton
Hotel, from 10am –12pm
Saturday 16th February
– informal meeting
Saturday 13th April
– informal meeting

Monaghan 2018 – Support Meeting

Venue: Dóchas for Women, Monaghan Town
Future meetings TBD

Portlaoise 2019 – Surrogacy Support Meeting

Venue: Maldron Hotel, Portlaoise, from 1pm – 3pm
Saturday 19th January – informal meeting

**Other meetings are arranged from time to time
please keep an eye on the website.**

Dublin 2019 – Donor Conception Meeting

Venue: Dublin Airport Hilton
Hotel, from 10am –12pm
Saturday 26th January
– informal meeting
Saturday 23rd March
– informal meeting

Limerick 2019 – Support Meeting

Venue: TBC,
from 8pm –10pm
Friday 11th January
– informal meeting
Friday 1st March –
informal meeting

Membership

Building NISIG's membership is paramount to our advocacy efforts and ensures that you belong to a community of individuals and families with your best interests in mind. Our network is built on our shared experiences and offers support at every level of the journey.

Thank you to all members who have renewed their membership for the coming year. For anyone looking to join or renew membership, please see our membership page on the **website: nisig.com/support-us/membership**.

Family Conversations: Donor Talks

Are you parenting donor conceived children and wondering how to initiate conversations with them about their origins? We will be holding our second Family Conversations: Donor Talks event, this time in Dublin on February 3rd. We had a full house at the first one, so if you'd like the opportunity to meet with parents, grandparents and a donor conceived young adult, to learn from their experiences, register now by contacting us on nisigireland@gmail.com.

E-mail: nisigireland@gmail.com
www.nisig.com

NISIG is a Registered Charity No. 12247

P.O. BOX 131
Togher, Cork
T12 C825

Contact us:
Helen 087 797 5058 anytime