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978-1-906-98513-4 - Reproductive Ageing

Edited by Susan Bewley, William Ledger and Dimitrios Nikolaou


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Reproductive ageing



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Since 1973 the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has regularly convened Study Groups to address important growth areas within obstetrics and gynaecology. An international group of eminent clinicians and scientists from various disciplines is invited to present the results of recent research and to take part in in-depth discussions. The resulting volume, containing enhanced versions of the papers presented, is published within a few months of the meeting and provides a summary of the subject that is both authoritative and up to date.

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[More information](#)

Sean Kehoe MD FRCOG

Convenor of Study Groups, Lead Consultant in Gynaecological Oncology, Oxford Gynaecological Cancer Centre, John Radcliffe Hospital, Headington, Oxford OX3 9DU

Susan Bewley MD MA FRCOG

Consultant Obstetrician / Maternal Fetal Medicine, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, Women's Services, 10th Floor North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7EH

William Leigh Ledger MA DPhil FRCOG

Professor, Jessop Wing, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2SF

Dimitrios Nikolaou MD MRCOG

Consultant Gynaecologist and Specialist in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery, Ovarian Ageing and Fertility Clinic, Assisted Conception Unit, 4th Floor, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, 369 Fulham Road, London SW10 9NH

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Participants

David Barlow

Executive Dean of Medicine and Professor of Reproductive Medicine, University of Glasgow, Wolfson Medical School Building, University Avenue, Glasgow G12 8QQ

Susan Bewley

Consultant Obstetrician / Maternal Fetal Medicine, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, Women's Services, 10th Floor North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7EH

Siladitya Bhattacharya

Professor of Reproductive Medicine and Head, Section of Applied Clinical Sciences, Division of Applied Health Sciences, School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, Cornhill Road, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD

Beverley Botting

Government Statistician, Office for National Statistics, 1 Myddelton Street London EC1R 1UW at the time of the Study Group meeting; now Survey Outreach Officer, National Centre for Social Research, 35 Northampton Square, London EC1V 0AX

Peter Braude

Head of Department of Women's Health, King's College London, School of Medicine, Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Hospitals, 10th Floor North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH

Kate Brian

Author and trustee of Infertility Network UK (INUK). katebrian@mac.com.

Catherine Coulson

Associate Specialist in Psychosexual and Reproductive Medicine, Reproductive Medicine Clinic, St Michael's Hospital, Southwell Street, Bristol BS8 2EG

Melanie Davies

Consultant Gynaecologist, Reproductive Medicine Unit, University College London Hospitals, Euston Road, London NW1

Mandish K Dhanjal

Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Du Cane Road, London W12 0HS

Donna Dickenson

Emeritus Professor of Medical Ethics and Humanities, University of London and Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Bristol

Roger Gosden

Professor and Director of Research in Reproductive Biology, Center for Reproductive Medicine and Infertility, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, 1305 York Avenue (7th floor), New York, NY 10021, USA

Berkeley Greenwood

Political Adviser to the National Infertility Awareness Campaign (NIAC) and Senior Consulting Director, Portcullis Public Affairs, St James House, 13 Kensington Square, London W8 5HD

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[More information](#)

PARTICIPANTS | ix

Stephen G Hillier

Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, Centre for Reproductive Biology, The University of Edinburgh, The Queen's Medical Research Institute, 47 Little France Crescent, Edinburgh EH16 4TJ

Stijn Hoorens

Senior Analyst, RAND Europe, 37 Square de Meeus, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Sean Kehoe

Convenor of Study Groups, Lead Consultant in Gynaecological Oncology, Oxford Gynaecological Cancer Centre, John Radcliffe Hospital, Headington, Oxford OX3 9DU

Anna Kenyon

Clinical Lecturer/Sub-specialty Trainee in Maternal and Fetal Medicine, Fetal Medicine Unit, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Wing, University College Hospital, 235 Euston Road, London NW1 2BU

William Ledger

Professor, Jessop Wing, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2SF

Diana Mansour

Associate Medical Director, NHS Newcastle and North Tyneside, Community Services, New Croft Centre, Sexual Health Services, Market Street (East), Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6ND

Finbarr Martin

Consultant Geriatrician, Elderly Care Unit, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH

Gita Mishra

Senior Research Scientist, MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing, Royal Free and University College Medical School Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, 33 Bedford Place, London WC1B 5JU

Dimitrios Nikolaou

Consultant Gynaecologist and Specialist in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery, Ovarian Ageing and Fertility Clinic, Assisted Conception Unit, 4th Floor, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, 369 Fulham Road, London SW10 9NH

Helen Picton

Chair in Reproduction and Early Development, The Reproduction and Early Development Research Group, Leeds Institute of Genetics, Health and Therapeutics, University of Leeds, The Light Laboratories, Clarendon Way, Leeds LS2 9JT

Jane Preston

Senior Lecturer, King's College London, Pharmaceutical Sciences Research Division, Hodgkin Building, Guy's Campus, London SE1 1UL

Gordon CS Smith

Professor and Head of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Cambridge, Box 223, The Rosie Hospital, Robinson Way, Cambridge CB2 0SW

Alastair Sutcliffe

Senior Lecturer in Paediatrics and Honorary Consultant Paediatrician, General and Adolescent Unit, Institute of Child Health, University College London, 30 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1EH

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[More information](#)

x | PARTICIPANTS

Herman Tournaye

Senior Medical Director, Centre for Reproductive Medicine, Universitair Ziekenhuis Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 101, Laarbeeklaan, Brussels B-1090, Belgium

Maya Unnithan

Reader in Social Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, ARTSC, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9SJ

Zoe Williams

Journalist, The Guardian, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU

Additional contributors

Yasmin Baki

Paediatric Registrar, Department of Paediatrics, University College Hospital, 235 Euston Road, London NW1 2BV

Emma Chambers

Research Fellow, The Reproduction and Early Development Research Group, Leeds Institute of Genetics, Health and Therapeutics, University of Leeds, The Light Laboratories, Clarendon Way, Leeds LS2 9JT

Rachel Cooper

Career Development Fellow, MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing, Royal Free and University College Medical School Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, 33 Bedford Place, London WC1B 5JU

Ahmed Gibreel

Research Fellow, Division of Applied Health Sciences, School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, Cornhill Road, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD

Abha Maheshwari

Clinical Lecturer and Subspeciality Trainee in Reproductive Medicine, Division of Applied Health Sciences, School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, Cornhill Road, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD

Lucinda Veeck Gosden

Director of Clinical Embryology and Associate Professor, Center for Reproductive Medicine and Infertility, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, 1305 York Avenue (7th floor), New York, NY 10021, USA

DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

All contributors to the Study Group were invited to make a specific Declaration of Interest in relation to the subject of the Study Group. This was undertaken and all contributors complied with this request. David Barlow has received sponsorship or paid consultancy work from Novo Nordisk, PregLem Pfizer and Wyeth. He holds shares of nominal value in PregLem. He is the Dean of Medicine at Glasgow University, which receives grants from a wide range of companies. He is an officer or member of the British Menopause Society, the National Osteoporosis Society, the European Menopause and Andropause Society and the RCOG. He was Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Human Reproduction* until 2007. Susan Bewley was paid for consultancy work in 2008 by RAND Organisation and is a member of the Medical Defence Union (MDU) Council and the National Childbirth Trust. She receives small royalties as editor of the OUP textbook *Training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology*. Peter Braude's department receives financial support from Merck Serono, Organon and Hologic. He is a consultant to or member of the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO), the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) and the Multiple Births Stakeholder Group. His department holds four patents related to premature labour. Kate Brian is a member of the board of trustees of Infertility Network UK (INUK) and is the author of *The Complete Guide to Female Fertility* and *The Complete Guide to IVF*. Catherine Coulson's department has received educational grants from Organon and Merck Serono and she is a consultant to the British Society of Psychosomatic Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Andrology. She is a Member of the Institute of Psychosexual Medicine and a member of the British Fertility Society. Melanie Davies is lead investigator for a research project sponsored by Organon. She has received limited editorial fees for two books that are in print. Roger Gosden has occasionally received honoraria for conference lectures. His department has received grants for research from EMD Serono and Ferring Pharmaceuticals and he is an unpaid consultant for Fertile Hope (New York) and for the Diamond Foundation, which are both non-profit organisations. Berkeley Greenwood is a consultant to the National Infertility Awareness Campaign (NIAC), which receives sponsorship from commercial organisations. Stephen Hillier has in the past received lecture fees or honoraria from Serono, Organon and Ferring. He has authored two patents but does not own them now. Stijn Hoorens has declared that RAND Europe has received research grants from Ferring Pharmaceuticals and Organon. RAND Europe has policies and contractual arrangements to safeguard the independence and objectivity of its research. Sean Kehoe has acted as an adviser for Sanofi Pasteur and received support to attend educational meetings. He is a council member of the British Gynaecological Cancer Society, a member of the NCRI Ovarian Subgroup and the British Society For Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology, a spokesperson for WOW, a trustee for OVACOME and an editorial board member of *BJOG*, the *European Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* and the *European Journal of Surgical Oncology*. William Ledger has received honoraria for lecturing/teaching from Schering Plough and Amirall. His department receives research funding for commercial studies from Akzo Nobel, Ferring, Schering Plough and Ipsen. He is a consultant to Verity – the PCOS charity, the National Infertility Awareness Campaign and the Pituitary Foundation. He has received payment for work as an Editorial Board Member of *Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Reproductive Medicine*. Dimitrios Nikolaou has been sponsored by Ferring and Serono to attend scientific meetings (less than £5,000 per year). His wife has some shares in Pfizer. His unit is sponsored for research by Ferring and Serono. Helen Picton's research group has received funding for research from industry for clinical trials and basic research. None of these projects would constitute a conflict of interest on this topic. She is the current chair of the Society for Reproduction and Fertility, which is a basic science society as well as a charity. Lucinda Veeck Gosden's department has received grants for research from EMD Serono and Ferring Pharmaceuticals. Herman Tournaye's department receives financial support from all major gonadotrophin companies (Ferring, Serono, Organon).

Infertility and miscarriage

Such hope.
And then the rain
Comes again.

I am angry,
I am frustrated,
I cry,
I am frustrated with the world,
But most of all,
I am frustrated with myself,
Although doctors frustrate me
A great deal.

In my head
I know I am not to blame,
In my heart,
I don't know who else there is.

Involuntary childlessness
Is like walking around
With an invisible limb missing.

When I leave my fertile years behind me
Will I finally be able to let it all go?
Or will the next generation
Appear to haunt me still?

Treatment

Courage is not
The absence of fear,
But rather
The ability to act
In the face of it

They say,
Infertility is as stressful
As cancer.
How many people know that?

Stereotypes

I am not a mother,
But nor am I
A career woman
Or over fourty,
But if I was,
Should I be judged
For using my brain, my talents
And forging a successful career?
Should I be criticised
For finding unsuccessful relationships
And for not finding Mr Right?
After all, it takes two
To make a baby and create a family.
And some people genuinely believe
That stability and life experience
Are factors in bringing up children,
Contrary to popular opinion,
Not all women consciously think
I'll be OK, no matter what,
Let me choose where the kids will fit in,
There's always the easy option of
Fertility Treatment and IVF
With their guilt-edged guarantees.
I can always buy
An egg, sperm, embryo, a baby.
No. It is not thoughtlessness that delays
The decision to have a family,
Far from it,
For the majority, it is life.

Darwin and his gene pool suck.
All I can hope
Is that evolution adapts,
And men start having babies too,
Which will not only benefit infertile women,
But also the work place, society
And the world in general.

Afterwards

I chase
Single magpies
Out of the garden



Preface

Ageing can be welcomed, endured or feared but it remains inevitable. Obstetricians and gynaecologists are uniquely placed to see and to alleviate the complications of diseases of pregnancy and the reproductive organs. They have to be knowledgeable and skilled in their broad or subspecialist expert areas in order to provide high-quality medical services to women. They have an understanding of how age affects biology and disease, particularly when the population is ageing and in an era of deferred childbearing. They also have to respect and understand the complex lives that women lead and the diverse families and communities they come from, and be sensitive to the impact that obstetric and gynaecological problems may have. Our histories, examinations, tests, diagnoses and prognoses can threaten the core of a woman's identity and her fertility, sexuality, family and life experiences. Doctors have to avoid stereotypes and empathise with and listen to their patients but cannot always 'walk in another's shoes'. The poems opposite distil some of the private pain and public pleas of women experiencing the adverse effects of reproductive ageing.

Since 1973, the RCOG has regularly convened Study Groups to address important topics in our specialty. Ageing and reproductive ageing affect us all as individuals and as society. Obstetricians and gynaecologists are witnesses to the impact of reproductive ageing and to some of the fears, misinformation and misapprehensions that the general public have. One purpose of the Study Group was to raise awareness of the societal trends and implications. Practitioners, academics and informed lay contributors from around the world were brought together to look at the current situation and available evidence. The wider importance of the subject to the whole of society is emphasised by the contributions in this volume from experts from other disciplines, both within and outside medicine. Reproductive ageing has effects on individual and public health, now and in generations to come. It is experienced differently by different cultures, by the voluntarily and involuntarily childless and by those responsible for organising health services. Although women are healthier than ever, biology can still determine destiny and the decline in fertility and rise in complications with age remain. Scientists can understand but cannot yet control or reverse the processes of ageing, even as they contribute to the means of alleviating the suffering that it may bring. This volume gathers together a diverse but timely set of contributions in order to inform Members and Fellows of the RCOG, interested healthcare and research workers and the general public.

We are greatly indebted to the participants who provided their manuscripts on time and who worked so hard during the Study Group. As always, the RCOG staff made the behind-the-scenes work run smoothly and contributed to the success of the meeting. In particular, we would like to thank Jessica Letters, Andrew Welsh and Jane Moody. The Study Group participants wanted to celebrate the positive aspects of ageing, not stigmatise older women. We enjoyed ourselves and hope that those who read the book, and especially the stimulating discussions, will do so too.

Susan Bewley
William Ledger
Dimitrios Nikolaou
Sean Kehoe