

# ESSEX FERTILITY SUPPORT 12 WEEK PROGRAM

The Art & Science of Fertility Support

**Who We Are**  
**How We Work**



Essex Fertility & Women's Health  
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## Who We Are and How We Work

We are two lovely ladies who are passionate about supporting people struggling with fertility issues, we offer physical and emotional support, guidance and a listening ear. We blend our extensive knowledge of infertility from a western medical perspective with the ancient knowledge about how to support fertility from a Chinese medicine perspective. We offer support for the mind, body and soul and will walk with you as expert guides through this difficult landscape.

## Unexplained Infertility

We specialise in supporting people who are struggling with unexplained infertility and women preparing to be single mums who would benefit from our expert guidance and support. In many cases what we do here is enough to resolve things, but there are always some tricky cases that come our way - for these we have an incredible network of fertility experts to call on for advice or to refer onto when necessary. When things are really tough we work closely with a multi-disciplinary team which may include acupuncture, visceral osteopathy, functional medicine, specialist ultrasonography, urologists, gynaecologists and some of the most innovative IVF clinics.

## Alex O'Connor

*"I have a very integrated approach; I combine my knowledge of how to support fertility from a Chinese Acupuncture perspective with extensive experience in working out how to diagnose the causes of infertility from a Western Medical perspective.*

*Infertility needs to be tackled holistically. When working in this space there is a need for up to date knowledge of the science of infertility and the multitude of tests and investigations that are available, but there is also the need for the softness and the nurturing that acupuncture can bring, a need for emotional support, guidance and a listening ear. I strive to bring together all these aspects of fertility support for my clients; I work with a small list so that I can ensure that each and every one of my clients gets as much support as they need.*

*As well as using the classic acupuncture diagnostic tools like the pulse, the tongue and patterns from major health contributors such as sleep, digestion and mood, I like to work with information from blood tests, scan results etc. I use all this information to help me to guide you in terms of diet and lifestyle advice to support a healthier cycle and improved fertility. Alongside this I treat the menstrual cycle and male fertility using Chinese acupuncture which has an amazing regulatory impact on hormonal health and the menstrual cycle and supports improvements to sperm health.*

*Many of the ladies who come to me either have a horrid, heavy, clotty, flooding bleed, or they are at the other extreme and have a particularly light, scanty bleed. Neither is ideal for fertility, and acupuncture helps in both of these extremes - if you experience either of these, we usually see a really noticeable difference to your cycle within a month or two."*

## What is it like when you have acupuncture with Alex.

- 1hr acupuncture appointments, plenty of time for you to discuss everything and time for a relaxing, nourishing acupuncture session.
- You will learn to track and understand your cycle and what you can do to support a healthier, more fertile cycle.
- We work with tests and investigations that are not available on the NHS and unlikely to be run by a private IVF clinic - tests that might be able to show what the problem is and how to fix it. Some tests are included in the price of the Platinum package.
- You will gain more confidence in what can and cannot be expected from your GP and become more confident managing those awkward conversations where you are asking for something that they don't understand or don't want to do.
- You will feel supported and listened to throughout the whole process.
- You will be able to ask questions and get moral support between weekly appointments via phone, email or zoom (15mins/wk on Gold package, unlimited on Platinum package).
- We will help liaise with and coordinate any additional testing or referrals that seem necessary and help you to understand the results and see what action is recommended (up to 15mins/wk Gold Package, unlimited in Platinum Package).

## **Fertility Acupuncture for Men Too**

Male factor infertility is more widespread than most people think. Far too often poor sperm quality is dismissed as unimportant by IVF clinics and men are being told that they can 'fix' poor sperm through using IVF - in many cases that is simply not true, and it is a very expensive thing to do if it isn't necessary. Poor sperm health has long term implications for the safety of the pregnancy and the health of the child, so it is not something to be ignored if it can be improved.

Varicocele, cysts and prostate issues and seminal microbiome issues are all potential causes of male infertility so I pay close attention to anything that might suggest further investigations are warranted. We are able to refer for high quality semen analysis tests, semen culture, sperm DNA fragmentation tests and testicular ultrasound and if necessary we refer on to some top level urologists who specialise in male fertility.

Sometimes there is nothing structural to be found, and no infection present - in these cases in my experience regular acupuncture can have a really good impact on male fertility. Acupuncture helps to reduce stress, improve libido and can improve quantity and quality of sperm.

When I am treating male fertility, I recommend treatment weekly for a month and then we can usually reduce treatment frequency. Bring him to your treatment session and he can have some acupuncture while we talk.

## **Treatment Frequency for Fertility Acupuncture**

The best way to start with fertility acupuncture is to attend treatment weekly. This produces the strongest response when it comes to improvements to menstrual cycles, blood test results, semen analysis etc. Once a good response has been established (as evidenced by better menstrual cycle, improved sleep, improved stress levels, improved libido, better digestion) we can discuss spacing treatments out.

A 3-4 month preparation window is essential prior to IVF to give us a chance to improve egg and sperm quality and underlying health (though my primary goal would be to help you avoid IVF altogether if possible). It takes at around 3-4 months for the follicles to develop, so we need to start early enough to have enough of an impact on the follicles that will be used for the IVF cycle.

This 3-4 month preparation window is based on there being no specific underlying issues that need to be resolved - if we uncover issues along the way we may advise you to delay your cycle to work on these first. If necessary we can minimise the acupuncture treatments to free up funds for other interventions, or even pause altogether while you work on a specific aspect that we have uncovered (complex digestive issues, varicocele repair etc).

## **Previously Unsuccessful IVF?**

Where do you go from there? Our advice would be to hit the pause button, and give us a little bit of time to work out what might be going on before pushing on into another IVF cycle. It is not unusual for us to find that we can uncover a few issues, resolve a few things and if it all falls into place, a natural pregnancy may occur before you get around to starting your next IVF cycle.

## Low AMH

Low AMH is a widely misunderstood, poorly explained test and few people seem to really understand the implications of low AMH when struggling with unexplained infertility.

I have created a practitioner course on the topic of Low AMH which was put together to try to widen the level of understanding about this emotive blood test, and have also created a simpler 'Explaining Low AMH' ebook which explains this topic in simple terms and answers a lot of questions.

## Teamwork . . .

I work alongside Gill Hind who is a visceral osteopath specialising in women's health for fertility, pregnancy and post-natal recovery. Gill's treatments can have an amazing impact on circulation to and from the ovaries and uterus and releasing internal tensions and adhesions - structural issues are a common contributing factor to unexplained infertility.

We also have a network of other expert practitioners to call on when faced with a difficult case - herbalists, nutritionists, functional medicine practitioners, specialist ultrasonographers, urologists, gynaecologists and some highly innovative IVF clinics.

We need to work closely with you too. We need to establish easy lines of communication so that we can get the information we need to unravel this for you, and so that you can feel as informed and supported as you need to be.

We find this combined approach the most effective way to work for the most positive outcomes - and you are a very important player in that team.



## Gill Hind

*“Since graduating I have done a 2 year post graduate diploma in Paediatrics with the Osteopathic Centre for Children and this included pregnancy, birth and embryology. This course is recognised by osteopaths world-wide as gold standard training. I worked in their clinic in London for 4 years.*

*This training and the use of gentler techniques have helped me develop my palpation skills exponentially. I feel that palpation is such an important skill for osteopaths and I am not just talking about mobility and motility but quality of the tissue under my hand. I have, and continue, to push my palpation skills by doing further training in visceral work – to really push myself and add new understanding to the unique anatomy that I feel under my hands. I am passionate about women’s health issues as I feel they are often dismissed or misunderstood.”*

*You may be starting or someway through your investigative journey of blood tests, scans and procedures to investigate why a pregnancy is not happening and feel you are not getting answers because nothing “specific” is being found. These procedures certainly have their place. An ultrasound of the uterus will tell you whether there is a issue with the “shape” of the uterus and whether there are any “blockages” (fibroids, cysts etc) which may affect implantation, whether the ovaries and follicles are present. What they don’t tell you is how these different organs move and relate to one another and to the body as a whole unit.*

*To have health, organs need a good blood supply (to provide oxygen and nutrition), good drainage (to take away waste products from the cells) and good lymphatics (to take away larger waste molecules that won't pass through the venous system). The organ also needs to "move" with your body and move well in relation to its neighbours. I call this the "slippy-slidy" quality – organs are not meant to "stick" to each other, they are encased in their own "bag" and should be able to move independently of one another with ease. Working with the body at this level can have a significant impact on the way the menstrual cycle runs.*

Gill is part of the MummyMOT® network trained to assess and review women post birth and aid them in their recovery and has completed ScarWork Training®.

She is currently working on further training in endometriosis and support/advocacy for this misunderstood and misdiagnosed condition.

### **What is it like having visceral osteopathy with Gill?**

You may think you know what osteopathy is like, but this is nothing like it!

Before starting to work with you, Gill will take a deep dive into your history - your birth history, early childhood, your physical and emotional history and any history of surgery or postural issues that you have.

Gill will also take careful note of your menstrual history and cycle symptoms - what is your period pain like, where do you feel it, what is the nature of the pain, when do you experience it? What is your flow like, what is the colour of the blood, the consistency of the blood? She will also assess your overall body tension patterns, where her attention is being drawn to will indicate to her where to start. Treatment itself is incredibly quiet and gentle as she assesses and adjusts body tensions.

The impact of treatment with Gill may be noticed immediately through a shift in our posture or movement patterns, it may be evidenced by a change in our period pain issues or period flow, or by a noticeable shift in ovarian activity on ultrasound.

Alongside her treatment of you from a physical perspective, Gill will also support you emotionally through her quiet, gentle nature. She is also trained in NLP which can bring an interesting edge to how she works with you.

Gill also refers clients for tests and investigations for unexplained infertility that are not part of a regular NHS infertility work up and unlikely to be offered by an IVF clinic.

### **In which situations is visceral osteopathy especially useful?**

There are certain issues that keep cropping up in our patients' history that flag an issue with the "mesh" and some of these are summarised as follows:

- Previous surgery (abdominal, keyhole, investigative or traumatic)
- History of pelvic pain (are there signs of endometriosis, fibroids, cysts?)
- History that includes a trauma, illness or event after which 'nothing has ever felt the same since'.
- Bladder and bowel issues (irritable bladder, UTI, IBS etc)
- Irregular, extremely heavy, extremely light or extremely painful periods
- Pain with sex, using mooncup or tampon, or extreme pain during HyCoty.
- Previous pregnancy, especially if followed by a difficult birth or a C-Section.
- If one ovary is always considerably more active than the other when viewed on ultrasound.

## **Treatment Frequency for Visceral Osteopathy**

Gill usually treats in the first half of the menstrual cycle when people are actively trying to conceive. If you are on our 12 week program, you can choose to have visceral osteopathy and acupuncture in the same week, or skip acupuncture on the week when they are having visceral osteopathy and take it at the end of the program (extending the length of the program).

In cases where there may be more extensive issues with menstrual pain, we may recommend more frequent treatment with Gill initially to improve the physical structures - by focusing on this aspect more at the beginning, we find we end up getting to where we want to get to faster. If this is you, and you are considering the 12 week program, you may want to consider working with Gill for a cycle or two before starting the program.

## Qualifications & Training

### Alex O'Connor MBAcC, LicAc, ADFA

Acupuncture BSc(Hons)

Member of the British Acupuncture Council

Member of the Fertility Support Trained Practitioner network

Member of the Acupuncture Fertility Network

Advanced Diploma in Fertility Acupuncture (the gold standard training for fertility support acupuncture)

Alex has undertaken innumerable specialist courses in different aspects of fertility such as:

- Spermageddon (male factor infertility with Olivia Krammer-Pojer)
- Female Ecology Mastercourse (vaginal microbiome with Moira Bradfield)
- The Reproductive Microbiome (Leah Hetchman)

Alex attends regular on-going training as part of the Fertility Support Trained Practitioner network which keeps her knowledge up to date and further deepens her understanding of the mechanisms of infertility.

In addition to this she has an ITEC holistic massage qualification and has trained in the art of Fertility Massage.

### Gill Hind M.Ost

Degree in Osteopathy M.Ost

Post Graduate Diploma in Paediatric Osteopathy

Registered with the General Osteopathic Council

Registered ScarWork® Practitioner

Registered MommyMot® Practitioner

Gill also has extensive training in the application of visceral osteopathy to women's health issues, fertility, pregnancy and post natal recovery.

## Disclaimer

We do not claim to be able to 'cure' infertility, but we are both experienced holistic practitioners who know how to recognise many of the things that can impede natural fertility. We are able to support you holistically, and to help you to navigate through the complex world of medical fertility investigations and assisted fertility interventions.

Our knowledge of unexplained infertility comes from experience of working in this field and not through any specific qualification. Alex has had extensive training in how to investigate infertility and support fertility in a more East/West integrated manner through the Advanced Diploma in Fertility Acupuncture and through her active engagement with the Fertility Support Trained Practitioner network. Gill has spent years deepening her knowledge and skills of women's pelvic health assessment and treatment.

We cannot promise success, even for clients that fully commit to working with us. We can promise to try our best, and for more difficult cases to work with our network of fertility experts to try to help you to reach a satisfactory outcome.

Neither Gill nor I are medically trained doctors and if we notice anything that we feel warrants medical input we will ask you to contact your doctor and explain why so that you can advocate for yourself.

# Fertility Support & Guidance

Unexplained infertility is not a diagnosis, it is a term too easily handed out as a result of a lack of investigation and poor understanding of the causes of infertility.

Alex and Gill work together in Essex and in the City to support and guide people struggling with infertility. They merge current, evidence-based knowledge of the mechanics of fertility from a Western medicine perspective with a deep understanding about how to support fertility from a holistic perspective.

Alex brings her knowledge of fertility from a Chinese Acupuncture perspective, Gill brings her knowledge and understanding of the structures and tensions in the body and how these can impact fertility. Together they work to support and guide people through the maze of unexplained infertility and through the anxious weeks of early pregnancy, through birth preparation and post natal recovery.

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