

## Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit (EPAU)

### What is an early pregnancy assessment unit?

An early pregnancy assessment unit (EPAU) is staffed by a dedicated team of doctors and nurses in order to see women and their partners with problems during their first 13 weeks of pregnancy. An EPAU is run by a team of doctors, nurses, ultrasonographers, midwives and support staff. They specialise in the problems of early pregnancy such as bleeding and pain.

### When should you go to an early pregnancy assessment unit?

- If you are in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and you experience bleeding. This could be anything from light spotting to something heavier than your usual period. You might see blood clots, brown discharge or other tissue.
- If you are in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and you are experiencing abdominal pain. This could be cramps in your tummy, along with pelvic or back pain.
- If you are being sick all the time.
- If you suspect for any reason you might be having a miscarriage.
- If your GP has referred you.

### What can they do for you at an early pregnancy assessment unit?

The staff will ask you questions about your medical history and discuss the problems you are experiencing now. They may test your blood or urine to measure your hormone levels in order to confirm that you are pregnant.

After this they may arrange an ultrasound scan for you. Ultrasonographers who are experienced in this type of scanning will carry out the scan and can check on the development of your pregnancy. If the pregnancy is in a very early stage, it may be most easily seen by a vaginal (internal) scan. This can be slightly uncomfortable, but it is not painful and it does not cause a miscarriage. It has the advantage that you do not need a full bladder for the scan to be carried out. After a heartbeat of a small baby has been found during a scan, most women leave the unit feeling reassured.

In some cases, the pregnancy is at such an early stage that it is not possible to tell whether the pregnancy is continuing. The heart only begins to beat at about six or seven weeks after your last period. The only way that they can tell the difference between an early pregnancy that will continue normally and one that is not, is to do another scan seven to ten days later to see whether there has been a change.

If the pregnancy is ectopic (growing in the fallopian tube, for example) it may be seen as a swelling outside the womb. Again, an ectopic pregnancy might be too small to be seen. The blood tests may indicate that the pregnancy hormone levels are increasing or levelling, but no pregnancy can be seen on scan.

Sometimes it might be necessary to have a physical examination to rule out an ectopic pregnancy or to look at your cervix.

## What if I feel anxious?

The staff caring for you at the unit know that this can be a stressful time and they will do their best to reduce your anxiety. Whatever your concerns, the staff at the early pregnancy assessment unit will endeavour to give you clear verbal and written information.

## What happens if I forget to ask something?

When you visit a unit they will give you a phone number so that you can call them afterwards if there is anything you are concerned about. In the event that you have been given bad news, staff will discuss all the options open to you.

## When are early pregnancy assessment units open?

The EPAU at Conquest Hospital is open between 8:00am and 4:00pm on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday, and mornings only on Wednesday and Thursday. The EPAU at Eastbourne DGH is open between 8:00am and 9:30am, Monday to Friday.

Outside these opening hours, general practitioners (GPs) have the discretion of admitting women with early pregnancy problems to the women's health ward in each hospital at any time of the day, although a scan may not be available until the following day.

## Do I need an appointment or can I just turn up?

At Conquest Hospital, the service is "appointment only", within the opening hours of the unit. Appointments can be made by GPs, midwives, the Emergency department and by calling the Conquest Hospital EPAU telephone number.

At Eastbourne, a referral from a GP or midwife is usually required. Patients coming from the Emergency department or other departments may also be seen during opening hours.

## Sources of information

### Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit

Mirrlees Ward  
Conquest Hospital  
The Ridge  
St Leonards-on-Sea,  
East Sussex, TN37 7RD  
Tel: (01424) 755255 Ext: 7047

### Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit

Women's Health Outpatients  
Eastbourne District General Hospital  
Kings Drive  
Eastbourne  
East Sussex, BN22 2UD  
Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 4158 (after 4pm 4911)

### Miscarriage Association

Clayton Hospital  
Northgate  
Wakefield,  
West Yorkshire WF1 3JS

Helpline 01924 299799

Website: [www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk](http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk)

### Early Pregnancy Information Centre

Website: [www.earlypregnancy.org.uk](http://www.earlypregnancy.org.uk)

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 5860 or by email at: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

**Tel: 01424 755255 Ext: 2620**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Mr David Chui, Consultant, Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Miss Nicky Roberts, Consultant, Obstetrics and Gynaecology

The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

The EPAU Working Group

Next review date: April 2019

Responsible clinician: Mr David Chui

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