



The Royal College of Midwives

Position Statement

Background

MPs Frank Field and Nadine Dorries have proposed two amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill relating to the provision of counselling for women seeking abortion. These proposed amendments state that clinical commissioning groups must arrange for the provision of “independent information, advice and counselling [sic] services for women requesting termination of pregnancy...” These services are considered independent if they are provided by “either a private body that does not itself provide for the termination of pregnancies; or a statutory body.”

A further related amendment also proposes that “regulations must require NICE to make recommendations with regard to the care of women seeking an induced termination of pregnancy.”

In addition, media have reported that the Department of Health intends to introduce the option of counselling provided by organisations who themselves do not provide abortion services (in addition to the existing advice from abortion providers).

RCM Position

Unplanned pregnancies happen to women and the RCM believes that every woman should have the right to choose how to deal with the situation, including being able to choose from whom they receive counselling. Counselling is an important part of the process when a woman is deciding what to do about her unplanned pregnancy. Choice should be at the forefront of all reproductive health and maternity care services.

The RCM is unequivocal that counselling and advice should be objective, balanced and impartial. Women should not be directed towards or away from any particular course of action except where there are medical reasons for doing so. The RCM believes that current counselling provision meets these standards. There is no evidence that existing providers of counselling and advice are directing women towards particular courses of action.

It is crucial that any changes to services do not make it more difficult for women who choose to have an abortion to access abortion services. There is great value in having counselling services available quickly and easily accessible through clinics that themselves provide abortions. This is important as decisions concerning abortion are critically time-dependent and any delay may impact on the methods and choices available to women.

The RCM believes attempting to enact 'independent' counselling for abortion in legislation is both unnecessary and that doing so detracts from the key issues in the Health and Social Care Bill.

The RCM also supports the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) as the organisation responsible for producing clinical guidance on abortion service provision. We are confident that the RCOG's guidance is both evidence-based and impartial.