Adjournment Debate – Tuesday 2 November 2010
Government policy on the information provided to women prior to a request for a termination of pregnancy

An adjournment debate is scheduled for the end of the day on Tuesday 2 November on Government policy on the information provided to women prior to a request for a termination of pregnancy, sponsored by Nadine Dorries MP.

We are concerned that issues including compulsory ‘cooling off’ periods and the unproven links between abortion and mental health will be raised in this debate.

Please attend this debate and speak up for a woman’s right to choose; a woman’s right to receive accurate and non directive information; and a woman’s right to make an informed decision without an enforced cooling off period.

A woman’s right to accurate, non-directive information

FPA believes that all women have the right to confidential, non-directive, accurate and up to date information about all pregnancy choices, including abortion. This means that when women are faced with an unplanned pregnancy they are able to make a choice that is best for them, informed by the facts.

Concerns are often raised that having an abortion can have an adverse effect on women’s mental health. There is no conclusive research to support statements about the link between abortion and poor mental health. A recent American Psychological Association report concluded that “the most methodologically sound research indicates that among women who have a single, legal, first-trimester abortion of an unplanned pregnancy for non-therapeutic reasons, the relative risks of mental health problems are no greater than the risks among women who deliver an unplanned pregnancy.”¹

Research has shown that many women discuss their options for an unplanned pregnancy with their partner, families or friends and have made a clear decision to have an abortion before they even approach a healthcare professional². Once

a woman gets to an abortion service she will be given a further opportunity to
counter her decision as part of a pre-abortion consultation
and extra decision-making support is provided for women who require or request
it. In addition, before a procedure can take place, a woman gives informed
consent, which involves being told about and understanding the risks of the
abortion.

FPA believes that it is unnecessary to enforce a legal duty on health
professionals to provide information about abortion, the principle of informed
consent which governs medical practice already ensures that this is the case. In
addition, we believe it would be unethical for healthcare professionals to inform
women of unproven links between abortion and poor mental health. Women must
be able to make their own decision about what is best for them supported by
accurate and non-directive information.

### Compulsory cooling off periods

Cooling off periods impose an artificial limit on women’s access to abortion
services. FPA believes the intention of compulsory cooling off periods is to create
obstacles for women trying to access abortion with the hope that it will deter them
from accessing services and therefore reduce the number of abortions taking
place.

Evidence shows that abortions which take place at earlier gestations have a
lower relative risk of complications than later abortions. In recent years the
proportion of women having an abortion before 12 weeks has increased.

Research from the United States has shown that even small mandatory delays
prevent some women from accessing abortion services. This is particularly the
case for women who present later in pregnancy, who are often the most
vulnerable, who might be unable to access abortion within the legal time limit if
systemic delays were introduced. In addition, more women will be forced to have
later abortions than they otherwise would, with the greater potential risks this can
pose.

FPA does not believe that a cooling off period should be a compulsory
requirement for women accessing abortion services. Delaying women’s access
to services unnecessarily will be detrimental to their emotional and physical
health and wellbeing, and means that the abortion will take place at a later stage
than would otherwise be the case, leading to potentially more invasive surgery.

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3 Royal College of Obstetricians, *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion: evidence

4 Althaus F A and Henshaw S K, ‘The effects of mandatory delay laws on abortion patients and
providers’, *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol 26, no 5 (1994), 228-231,233
Please attend this adjournment debate and speak up for a woman’s right to choose.

If you have any questions about this briefing please contact Hayley Blackburn FPA Policy Manager, on 020 7608 5259 or hayleyb@fpa.org.uk