Welcome to the twentieth edition of DASH

This edition includes:

- publication of guidance for health and social care professionals on abortion
- information about FPA’s pregnancy choices counselling service
- commentary on the removal of the ban on selling HIV self-testing kits
- an update on Sexual Health Week 2016 and the All Party Group on Sexual Health
- contact details of contraception and sexual health clinics in Northern Ireland.

In our regular Horizons feature, Aine Owens talks about her role as a Mencap ambassador.

FPA welcomes guidance on abortion for health and social care professionals

Mark Breslin, FPA’s Northern Ireland Director, on why it was so important for updated abortion guidance to be published.

It has been more than a decade since FPA successfully challenged the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in the High Court over its refusal to issue guidance around abortion law to health and social care professionals.

Countless women and families have been affected by the subsequent delays and subjected to a system in which professionals have been working in fear and confusion and women have been refused support and left in a state of crisis.

We now have a document which can provide doctors, nurses and other staff with clarity around abortion law (continued on page 4)
FPA pregnancy choices and post-abortion counselling service

FPA offers a pregnancy choices counselling service. We provide a safe space for women to explore their feelings around the pregnancy and our counselling is impartial and confidential. We provide women with information on parenthood, adoption and abortion and all options are discussed in a non-directive way. This means the counsellor has no opinion about what is best for women.

All women can also access post-abortion counselling, regardless of age, or where or when an abortion has taken place.

To book an appointment in Belfast or Derry call 0345 122 8687

HIV self-testing kits: A positive choice?

In January 2016 it became legal to buy HIV self-testing kits in Northern Ireland. Jacqueline Richardson, CEO of Northern Ireland’s only HIV-dedicated charity, Positive Life, welcomed the move.

Self-testing will support increased HIV testing by providing an alternative choice. It means that people can test in the privacy of their own home if they want to and will, in some cases, lead to earlier diagnoses and allow treatment to start sooner.

This will help to reduce the prevalence of HIV in years to come as people who may otherwise not have tested could have unknowingly passed the virus on to other people.

In 2014, 94 new cases of HIV were diagnosed in Northern Ireland and a major issue is late diagnosis; 51% of new diagnoses in 2014 were made at a late stage.

Positive Life welcomes this shift in law as the impact could be substantial. However, negative consequences may arise if people are testing at home, including unexpected emotional distress. We would encourage those with a positive result to ensure they seek both medical and emotional support as soon as possible.

There is also the unknown risk of a possible false negative result and, for some people, a lack of understanding that there is a period of time where infection is present but may not yet be detected by the test. If either of these outcomes occur, someone may be falsely reassured that they are not affected by HIV.

However, despite some reservations, Positive Life is supportive of any measures that increase testing and awareness of HIV infection, and the opportunity for early detection and intervention.

Our expert staff can confidentially help those worried or confused to further understand self-testing.

For more information visit www.positivelifeni.com

Date for the diary

Abortion and Reproductive Justice – The Unfinished Revolution II

Thursday 2 and Friday 3 June 2016
Ulster University, Belfast

This conference, hosted by the Institute of Research in Social Sciences at Ulster University, focuses on the question “How does abortion sit within the reproductive justice framework?”

The event is the first international conference on this theme to be held in the UK and Ireland and will cover topics such as abortion stigma, barriers to legal reform, medicalisation, human rights, migration, provider refusal, activism, abortion narratives, sex-selective abortion, and religion.

For further information, email RJConf@ulster.ac.uk

For more information visit www.positivelifeni.com
We sat down with Aine Owens, one of Mencap’s ambassadors, who spoke at the Sexual Health Week 2016 launch event at Stormont.

Tell us about your role as Mencap Ambassador.
I speak on behalf of people with a learning disability – I speak up for those who can’t speak or are too shy to speak. I have been asked to speak about relationships, education and transition services. I was very proud to be asked to speak at Stormont and have actually been asked to speak again at Stormont.

At the launch of Sexual Health Week, you spoke with such confidence during your presentation about relationships. Where does that confidence come from?
My family are very confident and talented, so they must have passed that on to me! My family have always been very supportive and encouraging of me. I am very lucky as I know not everyone has this support.

What barriers to relationships do you and other people with learning disabilities face?
One of the biggest barriers is being able to socialise and meet new people. The only chance to meet boys of my own age has been at school and a limited number of social clubs.

But there are a lot of fears and concerns from parents/carers that we will get hurt or taken advantage of so we are always supervised, which is very difficult. How would you feel if someone was constantly watching you as you tried to get to know someone you fancied?

People with a learning disability also need to understand what relationships are, for example the difference between best friends and partners, responsibilities of a relationship and how to deal with falling out.

There are also big risks now with the internet and social media. I had problems on social media when I was younger but I was aware of the risks and went straight to my parents when I knew something wasn’t right. Other people need to know the risks and what they can do to make things safer.

I want more people to understand what it is like to have a learning disability. We want to be loved not just by our parents, but other people too!

If I could give you one wish today, what would it be?
Can I have two? I want to have more opportunities to meet people and socialise in an environment that is right for me. I also want to be able to change and promote the rights of people with learning disabilities with the likes of employment and wages.

What do you like to do in your spare time?
I love writing poetry, going for a walk and being on my laptop (especially social media).

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Free contraception and STI leaflets

Funded by the Public Health Agency, these can be delivered directly to contraception and sexual health services, genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics and general practices. To order, register your details at www.fpa.org.uk/nhs and we will open an online account for you.

For further information contact FPA on 028 9031 6100
Sexual Health Week
2016

The theme for Sexual Health Week this year was informed choice, with an emphasis on pleasure.

The launch event at Stormont focused on what informed choice means for some of the different groups that make up the All Party Group.

Speakers explored choices for women accessing FPA’s pregnancy choices counselling, for young people with and without a learning disability, in relation to HIV self-testing kits and the choices available around pre-exposure prophylaxis drugs to prevent HIV infection.

The event was attended by more than 80 representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

FPA would like to thank the Chair of the All Party Group on Sexual Health, Paula Bradley MLA, for launching the event. We would also like to thank Anna Lo for her support in recent years and wish her well in retirement.

FPA welcomes guidance on abortion for health and social care professionals (continued from page 1)

and which, crucially, focuses on women and the support they need before, during and after seeking a termination.

It is encouraging that the importance of counselling for women who want it has been reinforced, both while making decisions about a pregnancy and after an abortion, regardless of where the abortion has taken place. The newly published guidance states:

- Counselling must support women to come to their own decisions.
- Support and advice must respect the personal views of the woman and enable her to make her own informed choices.
- It is not unlawful to inform a woman of services available in other jurisdictions.

FPA has provided a pregnancy choices and post-abortion counselling service (see page 2) for more than 20 years, based on the fundamental importance of giving women the time and space to talk about how they feel and go through their options in a nondirective, unbiased way.

Now we have this document to clarify the current law, FPA is calling on the DHSSPS to ensure the training needs identified in the guidance are implemented in all regions, and clear and consistent working practices are put in place.

The guidance document can be viewed at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-hsc-professionals-termination-pregnancy-northern-ireland
Clinic locations

Contraceptive and sexual health clinics (CASH). For further information contact FPA on 0345 122 8687.
### Clinic locations – continued

#### Southern Area

- **Lurgan Health Centre**
  - 100 Sloan Street
  - Lurgan Craigavon
  - Co Armagh BT66 8NT
  - Mon 10:00–12:00

- **John Mitchell Place**
  - Newry
  - Co Down BT34 2BU
  - Mon 09:30–11:30
  - Tue 09:30–11:30 & 13:00–15:00
  - Thu 09:30–11:30

- **Dungannon Health Clinic**
  - 38 Thomas Street
  - Dungannon BT71 4AU
  - Mon 09:40–11:20
  - Wed 18:00–19:20
  - Thu 13:00–14:40

- **Scarva Street Surgery**
  - 49 Scarva Street
  - Banbridge BT32 3NH
  - Wed 09:00–11:00

- **Portadown Health Centre**
  - Tavanagh Avenue
  - Portadown BT62 3BU
  - Tue 18:00–19:45
  - Wed 13:00–14:30
  - Thu 14:00–14:30

- **Primary Care Centre**
  - Greencastle Street
  - Kilkeel BT34 4BH
  - Mon 14:00–16:00 apt only

#### Western Area

- **Central Bookings for Western Area**
  - 028 71 321758
  - Mon–Fri 09:00–17:00
  - Derry, Limavady, Strabane

- **Omagh Health Centre**
  - 21 Mountjoy Road
  - Omagh
  - Co Tyrone BT79 7BA
  - Mon 09:30–11:30
  - Thu 09:30–11:30 & 14:00–16:00
  - Mon 14:30–16:30 Teen Scene

- **Women’s Health South West Acute Hospital**
  - 124 Irvinestown Road
  - Enniskillen BT74 6DN
  - Tue 09:30–11:30
  - Tue 13:30–15:30 (alternate Tue)
  - Wed 09:30–11:30 (alternate Wed)

#### Northern Area

- **Central Bookings for Northern Area**
  - 028 28 266163
  - Mon–Fri 09:00–13:00
  - Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Cookstown, Glengormley, Larne, Magherafelt, Whiteabbey

- **Brook Clinic**
  - 20b Abbey Street
  - Coleraine BT52 1DU
  - Mon 14:30–17:00
  - Thu 14:30–17:00

- **The Northern Regional College (NRC) Sexual Health Clinic at Trostan Avenue**
  - Ballymena campus G22
  - (16+ family planning & STI testing – no coils fitted)
  - Thu 09:30–13:00

- **The Northern Regional College (NRC) Sexual Health Clinic at Newtownabbey**
  - 400 Shore Road
  - Newtownabbey BT37 9RS
  - (no coils fitted)
  - Mon 09:30–13:00

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