Adjournment debate on pregnancy counselling
Monday 12 December 2011

Please attend the debate and speak up for women’s right to access to accurate and non-judgemental information on all pregnancy choices.

What is pregnancy choices counselling?

The debate around pregnancy choices counselling often focuses on ‘abortion counselling.’ We believe that term ‘abortion counselling’ presumes the conclusion of the counselling intervention and therefore the term used should always be ‘pregnancy choices counselling.’

Pregnancy choices counselling should focus on the three choices women have when they are pregnant; to continue with the pregnancy, to continue with the pregnancy and give the child up for adoption, and to have an abortion. All three of these choices may mean that a woman wishes to access counselling to support her decision-making or support after she has made the decision.

Counselling must aid personal choices, must not prevent women from making any of the three choices, and must not facilitate barriers to access or stigmatise women’s choices.

For women that may be considering abortion, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists’ (RCOG) Q&A document accompanying its updated guidance The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion sets out some criteria for professionals and clearly states that, “evidence shows that for women requesting an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy, the majority would have made up their minds to undergo the procedure and do not require further counselling.”

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What can be done to improve women’s access to accurate and non-judgemental information on pregnancy choices?

FPA and Brook would welcome any improvements in pregnancy choices counselling that are driven by the desire to help and protect women’s right to choose. We would oppose any changes to the system that were based on a position that is opposed to abortion.

**Develop quality standards based on accurate and evidence-based information**

We know that some organisations that are ideologically opposed to abortion exist to offer counselling to deliberately misinform women about the abortion procedure or impact of abortion and dissuade them for accessing abortion services\(^2\). As the updated guidance from the RCOG clearly states abortion is not associated with an increased breast cancer risk\(^3\). Furthermore, a recent systematic review of the mental health outcomes of induced abortion concluded that the rates of mental health problems for women with an unwanted pregnancy were the same whether they had an abortion or gave birth.\(^4\)

Currently, as there are no quality standards or regulation for pregnancy choices counselling these organisations are able to tell women anything they wish to about abortion or its outcomes. Any organisation or individual that gives information, advice or counselling on pregnancy choices should provide high-quality information about the risks associated with abortion as set out in the current RCOG guidelines and all information must be evidence-based, accurate and non-directive.

**Ensure adherence to any quality standards on pregnancy choices counselling**

The development of quality standards for pregnancy choices counselling, based on accurate, evidence-based and non-directive information; and the regulation or inspection of services to ensure that they are adhering to these quality standards, could ensure that women can make an informed choice about services they access.

Any organisation that offers counselling related to pregnancy choices should be required to clearly state its pro-choice/anti-choice position on any of its public-facing information as this would ensure that women can make informed choices about where to access counselling services from.

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\(^3\) *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion*: Evidence-based Clinical Guideline Number 7 (RCOG, November 2011) [http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/Abortion%20guideline_web_1.pdf](http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/Abortion%20guideline_web_1.pdf)

\(^4\) *Induced abortion and mental health: a systematic review of the mental health outcomes of induced abortion, including their prevalence and associated factors*, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (December 2011).
Ensure independent sector providers remain able to provide pregnancy choices counselling
Currently independent sector providers like British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas) and Marie Stopes International (MSI) deliver pregnancy choices counselling to women if they need it. Evidence shows they are working in the best interests of the women they see to facilitate choice, whichever choice it may be. These organisations are already regulated for the services they provide and the regulations ensure that women must be fully informed about the choices available to her – including alternatives to an abortion.

Please attend the debate and speak up for women’s right to access to accurate and non-judgemental information on all pregnancy choices.

For more information on this briefing please contact Clare Laxton, Policy and Parliamentary Manager, on clarel@fpa.org.uk or 020 7608 5258.

About FPA
FPA is one of the UK’s leading sexual health charities. Our mission is to help establish a society in which everyone has positive, informed and non-judgmental attitudes to sex and relationships; where everyone can make informed choices about sex and reproduction so that they can enjoy sexual health free from prejudice or harm. We do this through providing a comprehensive sexual health information service for professionals and the public, running community based relationships and sex education programmes and campaigning to ensure that high quality sexual health information and services are available to all who need them. FPA delivers non-judgemental and non-directive pregnancy choices counselling in Northern Ireland

To find out more about FPA and the work we do please visit our website: www.fpa.org.uk

About Brook
Brook is the UK’s leading provider of sexual health services and advice for young people under 25. The charity has over 45 years of experience working with young people and currently has services in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Jersey.

Brook services provide free and confidential sexual health information, contraception, pregnancy testing, advice and counselling, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and outreach and education work, reaching over 300,000 young people every year. To find out more about Brook visit: www.brook.org.uk. Ask Brook helpline 0808 802 1234.