

## Doctors for Choice UK Position Statement

### Training and workforce

Access to safe abortion hinges on the availability of sufficient numbers of trained abortion providers. In recent years organisations such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) have expressed concerns about the numbers of doctors being trained in abortion care (RCOG has offered an advanced training skills module in abortion care since 2007, yet fewer than 1% of trainees have taken it). There is particular concern about the shortage of adequately trained clinicians who can perform later abortions and abortions for women with complex medical problems. These women often face difficulties in accessing abortion care, with many experiencing delays in care and/or having to travel long distances to access care. Furthermore, a lack of appropriately trained doctors in surgical abortion can also lead to delays in emergency treatment in the cases of complicated missed or incomplete miscarriage.

There are several factors contributing to these workforce concerns:

- Junior doctors' lack of exposure to clinical role models and to routine mentoring, training and valuable learning opportunities – exacerbated by the outsourcing of NHS abortion care to independent providers who now perform two-thirds of UK abortions and who are not contracted to train doctors\*
- Lack of clinical abortion education in medical schools
- Lack of awareness of the consequences of 'backstreet' and self-induced abortions which women resort to when they are unable to access safe, legal abortion
- Anti-abortion stigma – fuelled by anti-abortion campaigns in recent years
- Lack of training opportunities in abortion care – the main route to working in abortion care is through Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G) training, a 7 year specialty training programme that is often unsuited to junior doctors who wish to work in abortion care and to whom training in Obstetrics or other aspects of Gynaecology is undesirable and/or irrelevant to their career plans

Doctors for Choice UK supports initiatives that aim to inspire conscientious commitment to abortion care in medical students and trainees and to improve doctors' training to ensure workforce sustainability.

Our recommendations:

- Continue efforts to de-stigmatise and integrate abortion training into undergraduate and relevant post-graduate medical education as a critical element of women's reproductive health care. Abortion education should be included in the curricula of all medical schools and include clinical and practical aspects of abortion care and not solely focus on legal and ethical issues, which can depict abortion as a controversial ethical topic.
- Mandatory abortion training for O&G trainees with increased availability of training modules in abortion (with the ability to opt-out for those with a conscientious objection).
- Expand routes and opportunities for training in abortion care to doctors outside of O&G training programs.
- Enable clinicians experienced in abortion care to act as mentors.
- Enable independent providers to provide training opportunities to NHS trainees, possibly incorporating training as part of commissioning contracts.
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- Promote access to support services for abortion care providers e.g. The British Society of Abortion Care Providers (BSACP)

#### Further reading

- Reforming abortion services in the UK: less hypocrisy, more acknowledgment of complexity - Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care, Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare  
<http://srh.bmj.com/content/43/1/3.info>
- The future of abortion care – Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 'In Focus'  
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/members/membership-news/og-magazine/winter-2017/future-of-abortion-care.pdf>

\*Despite this, Doctors for Choice UK recognises the benefits of abortion provision in the independent sector in terms of delivery of specialist, high quality care and values the important role that independent providers play in pro-choice advocacy