

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride

HSS(MD) 8/2016

To:
Chief Executives HSC Trusts
Medical Directors HSC Trusts (*for onward dissemination to all Trust Doctors*)
Directors of Nursing HSC Trusts (*for onward dissemination to all Trust Midwives and Nurses*)
All General Practitioners
Director of Public Health/Executive Medical Director,
Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Castle Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 0563
Fax: 028 9052 0574
Email: michael.mcbride@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD) 8/2016
Date: 25 March 2016

Dear Colleague

GUIDANCE ON TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

ACTION REQUIRED

- PHA, HSCB and HSC Trusts should work together to ensure that appropriate arrangements for care and support are in place to allow all eligible women access to termination of pregnancy services.
- PHA, HSCB and HSC Trusts should liaise to develop regional information leaflets on termination of pregnancy.
- Appropriate systems should be in place to ensure accurate recording of all terminations of pregnancy.
- Trust Chief Executives should ensure that they are satisfied that all terminations carried out within their Trusts fall within the legal criteria set out in the Guidance.

Summary

1. Guidance for health and social care professionals on Termination of Pregnancy in Northern Ireland was published on 25 March 2016. This Guidance is intended to provide clarity on the existing law relating to the termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland and guide health and social care professionals in its application in clinical practice. The document can be accessed at <https://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/guidance-termination-pregnancy.pdf>

Background

2. The Guidance was produced following an Order by the Court of Appeal for the Department to consider what steps it should take to:
 - inquire into the adequacy of termination of pregnancy services provided in Northern Ireland (including aftercare); and
 - following such inquiry, and after appropriate consultation with concerned organisations, issuing appropriate guidance.
3. The law relating to the termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland differs from that of the rest of the UK. During the Department's enquiries prior to the development of the Guidance, it was clear that health professionals required guidance as to the circumstances in which a termination of pregnancy would be lawful in Northern Ireland. While by necessity, clinical judgement will always be required in making the decision to terminate a pregnancy, the Guidance seeks to explain the circumstances where a termination of pregnancy may be carried out in Northern Ireland.

The Guidance

4. The Guidance has been developed following wide consultation with interested parties including health professionals and their governing bodies. Legal advice was also sought throughout the development of the Guidance. The Guidance cannot and does not make any changes to the law of Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to guide health and social care professionals on the application of the law in this area. The Guidance recognises that women must be made aware of the options and choices available to them under the law in Northern Ireland. It also provides guidance on some of the factors that need to be taken into account during clinical assessment and management of women for whom termination of pregnancy may be an option.
5. It is important that all women eligible for termination of pregnancy procedures in Northern Ireland receive appropriate care, regardless of whether they decide to go ahead with the pregnancy or not. Provision should be made for all women to receive appropriate treatment including counselling before and after their decision on whether or not to terminate the pregnancy. Appropriate arrangements for care and support should be in place for all women considering a termination of pregnancy and the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency and HSC Trusts should work together to ensure that such arrangements are in place.
6. All women should have access to written information about termination of pregnancy. Health and Social Care organisations should work together to

develop regional leaflets which explain when termination of pregnancy can be provided in Northern Ireland within the current legal framework and also provide more detailed information for woman considering a termination of pregnancy.

7. There should be accurate recording in the woman's clinical notes of the decision to carry out a termination of pregnancy, including the clinical indications and any consultation that has taken place with other medical professionals.
8. Chief Executives will wish to be assured that any termination of pregnancy being carried out in their Trust is lawful.

Yours sincerely



Dr M McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Prof Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer

This letter is available on the DHSSPS website at
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/professional/cmo_communications.htm

cc
Chief Executive, Health & Social Care Board
Chief Executive, Public Health Agency
Chief Executive, Business Services Organisation
Chief Executive, Patient and Client Council
Dr D Cody, Royal College Psychiatrists
Dr J O'Kelly, Royal College of General Practitioners
Dr R Ashe, Royal College Obstetrics & Gynaecology
Professor S Elborn, Dean, Head of School of Medicine, Dentistry & Bio-medical Sciences QUB
Professor K Gardiner, NIMDTA
Dr C Loughrey, NIMDTA
Professor CI Curran, Dean of the Faculty of Life & Health Sciences, UU
Professor S Porter (Acting) Head of School of Nursing & Midwifery, QUB
Mrs A McLernon, Chief Executive, NIPEC
Mrs J Smyth, RCN
Ms B Hughes, RCM
Dr G Henry, HSC Clinical Education Centre
Ms D Taylor, HSC Leadership Centre
Mrs P McStay, LSAMO NI, PHA