

Chief Executive
Dr Cathy Jack

Chairman
Mr Peter McNaney, CBE

25 June 2021

Mr Keith McBride
Clerk
Committee for Health

By email : Jonathan.Lamont@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Mr McBride

Re: Protests at premises providing abortion services

Belfast Trust's Early Medical Abortion (EMA) service is provided at College Street in the city centre. EMA clinics are mostly on a Thursday and typically there are protesters each week on this day. Many patients report to staff that they feel harassed when attending the building. It should be noted that many patients are coming to the service for long acting contraceptive services and not for EMA.

Covid restrictions around people gathering in groups has meant the numbers of protesters has been small. There are usually up to 8 protesters present representing both Precious Life and CBRNI. The building operates an intercom system and it can take approximately 1–2 minutes for a patient to get through the door from first arriving. It is in this time period that patients have reported harassment which takes the form of shouting or protesters putting flyers in their hand or handbag. The Family Planning service has had frequent calls to the PSNI since the summer 2020 for assistance in removing protesters.

The Trust met with PSNI and representatives of the Business Services Organisation who manage the building in May 2021 and a number of steps have been taken since then to further improve security for patients and for staff.

- A security presence has been put in place on Thursdays when EMA clinics are running. This has had a very beneficial impact and the behaviour of protesters seems to have changed simply by virtue of an 'official' being present and watching and waiting to greet the patient.
- The glass in the front door is being updated so protesters cannot see in from outside, the windows already have this. This will aid patients leaving the building.

- A security camera is to be installed capturing images outside the building.
- The intercom system is being updated so patients can gain access quicker.
- The service has been keeping the front door open on a Thursday when EMA clinics are running so patients can walk straight in and do not have to wait for access. The presence of a security person has ensured that protesters cannot gain access through the open door. This has also significantly helped protect patients.
- The PSNI will continue to respond to any requests for help if an incident occurs.

I trust this information is helpful to the Committee. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours sincerely

Bernie Owens

PP

Dr Cathy Jack
Chief Executive



Committee for Health

Dr Cathy Jack
Chief Executive
Belfast H&SC Trust

By email marion.moffett@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Our Ref.: C174/21

11 June 2021

Dear Dr Jack,

Re: Protests at premises providing abortion services

At its meeting on 10 June, the Committee for Health discussed the matter of protests held outside premises providing abortion services and other healthcare services.

Whilst recognising that there is a right to protest, the Committee is concerned that both patients and staff may feel intimidated and harassed by protesters. The Committee agreed to write to the H&SC Trusts to ask what measures they have taken, or plan to take, to address these concerns.

I am writing in similar terms to the Department of Justice and the Department of Health.

I would appreciate a reply by 25 June 2021.

Yours sincerely,

Keith McBride
Clerk
Committee for Health

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