

Our Ref: 714

7 May 2021

Mr Keith McBride
Health Committee Clerk
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 419 Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr McBride,

RQIA Evidence to Health Committee on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

I thank Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide you with The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's response in relation to the Severe Foetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill, as introduced by Paul Givan MLA on 16 February 2021.

The Authority's mandate, as set out in The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003¹, The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009², and in the 2011 Department of Health Framework Document³, is to provide the Minister, through the Department, with ongoing independent assessment of the quality, safety and availability of health and social care services; and to regulate effectively those services which we register.

Our responsibility to provide assurance of the quality of health and social care services provided by Health and Social Care Trusts will include termination of pregnancy services provided by those Trusts. The Authority would also have a role in the registration and regulation of any future private providers offering such services.

¹ The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2003/431/contents/made>

² Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2009/1/contents>

³ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) Framework Document (September 2011). Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/dhssps-framework-document-september-2011>

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The Authority's inspectors provide an assessment of quality against standards, which are set by the Department of Health. The standards relevant to termination of pregnancy services within Trusts are The Quality Standards for Health and Social Care 2006⁴ (The Quality Standards). These are core standards underpinning good governance and best practice within health and social care in Northern Ireland, and are underpinned by human rights legislation.

In respect of potential future private providers of termination of pregnancy services in Northern Ireland, the relevant standards are The Minimum Care Standards for Independent Healthcare Establishments⁵; and the Regulations are The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005⁶.

In conducting assessments of services against these Standards, including their human rights dimensions, RQIA would consider whether services are safe, effective and compassionate. In assessing the quality of services against The Quality Standards, RQIA requires that the service provided is in line with UK recognised best practice guidance. In the case of termination of pregnancy, that guidance is the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) 'Best practice in comprehensive abortion care' guidance⁷.

I trust you find this information useful and I remain happy to provide any further information upon request.

Yours sincerely



Dr A.B Stevens OBE
Interim Chief Executive

⁴ The Quality Standards for Health and Social Care 2006⁴ (The Quality Standards) Cited: April 2021. Available from <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/quality-standards-health-and-social-care>

⁵ Minimum Care Standards for Independent Healthcare Establishments. Cited: April 2021. Available from: https://www.rqia.org.uk/RQIA/media/RQIA/Resources/Standards/Independent_Healthcare_Minimum_Standards.pdf

⁶ The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Cited: April 2021. Available from: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2005/174/pdfs/nisr_20050174_en.pdf

⁷ Best practice in comprehensive abortion care' guidance. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/best-practice-papers/best-practice-paper-2.pdf>