

# Home Abortions

## A DOCTOR SPEAKS OUT

My name is Charlotte. I'm a doctor in a busy hospital in England. I am deeply disturbed that pills-by-post/home abortions have been voted to become permanent in this country. This has prompted me to speak out and raise some of the concerns I have as a medical professional which are echoed by many of my colleagues. People may think that because we work in a hospital, myself and my colleagues are unaffected by and removed from home abortions but in actual fact the ripple effect of these changes to the law affect us greatly and we are seeing first-hand what this really means for women. Let me give you an example by recounting an incident that occurred last year:

One evening paramedics arrived at our hospital with a premature infant, approximately 20-weeks old. They handed over the deceased child along with the details of the situation. The paramedics had been called out to the home of a highly distressed woman who had taken abortion pills prescribed by GP for collection at her pharmacy. The woman had received no in-person appointment prior to this and during her telephone consultation to obtain the pills had explained that she believed she was "4 weeks pregnant". In actual fact the woman was approximately 20 weeks pregnant.

I should mention as an aside, it's not uncommon for women to mistake some light bleeding during pregnancy for a period and so believe their pregnancy is a different gestation to what it really is. Neither is it that rare for women to put down any increase in weight or size to a change in their diet or exercise routine. Usually a scan would ensure that the pregnancy is accurately dated but women receiving pills-by-post commonly receive no scan.

The paramedics stated that the infant had been born alive but only lived a short while. One can only begin to imagine the fear and trauma experienced by the woman – this wasn't a 'product of conception' that she just 'passed' but a well formed child that she had to give birth to. Even the paramedics who have to undergo specialist training and are used to remaining calm in the most horrific of situations had to take some time-out at the hospital and have a very sweet, hot cup of tea before they could resume duty. I remember a shell-shocked look they shared that seemed to say 'What the heck just happened?!' My registrar, Christine, was the one who had direct contact with the 20-week old child and I could see she was visibly shocked. We shared a moment, away from work, to just be humans and debrief on the situation.

Of course there are some people who will rejoice at Wednesday's decision. We live in an 'Amazon Prime' society that wants everything done now. Those who promoted this change in the law argue that it is a plus that abortions are easier to access and can be rushed through even quicker. As a doctor, I cannot share this view. Women need to be given all the facts, including the risks attached to their decision, other

options and alternatives, a scan, an in-person appointment with a clinician and then time to consider the implications of their choice either way. Without an in-person appointment how can we even be sure the decision is truly theirs? How are women expected to dispose of a 20-week old child/fetus that they just birthed when even medical staff find this distressing?

The permanent legislation of home abortions has driven roughshod over the physical and mental health of women and disregards the affect it will also have on medical personnel. The intentionality of abortion coupled with the serious risks to health happening unsupervised in the isolation of people's own homes, creates a new level of trauma.

Personally I find it hard to even think about the anguish that woman went through and there are many more like her. I can't forget the expression on the face of my registrar, Christine, who had to deal with the 20-week old infant. Irrespective of anyone's views on abortion itself, from a professional, medical standpoint, we should be feeling very unsettled at what has happened. If this law remains unchallenged and unchanged then it is women who will pay the price and the consequences will be frightening.

*Names in this article have been changed to protect people's identity. If you have a story to share relating to abortion please get in touch.*