



## 'DIY home abortion' regulations in the UK *Are they set to stay despite safety concerns?*

Review by **David Smithard**, Triple Helix editor &  
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In March 2020, new temporary legislation was rolled out allowing for women to have Early Medical Abortions (EMA) at up to nine weeks and six days' gestation 'in their own homes, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic'.<sup>1</sup>

CMF and many others have repeatedly raised concerns about the safety of this 'home abortion' scheme. Within weeks it was revealed that police were investigating the death of a baby 'after its mother took abortion drugs at home while 28 weeks pregnant'.<sup>2</sup> An undercover investigation by Christian Concern revealed that women were able to obtain the pills after giving false names and gestations.<sup>3</sup>

Data from an FOI request to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revealed that between April and November 2020, 19 women received hospital treatment for complications following early medical abortion 'in which the gestational age (GA) of the pregnancy was greater than the legal

limit for EMA... including four cases in which the GA was beyond 24 weeks.'<sup>4</sup> Eleven of these cases involved women using the 'pills by post' scheme.

In a poll of Scottish adults conducted by SPUC, an 'overwhelming majority' of respondents expressed concern that without a face-to-face consultation, women might be pressured or coerced into having an unwanted abortion.<sup>5</sup>

The current arrangement was to be temporary, for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Now the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Scottish and Welsh governments have consulted on whether to extend the provision beyond its original timescale. CMF has responded to the consultations, setting out our concerns around women's safety, the risk of coercion, and the lack of appropriate record-keeping. You can read our submissions on the CMF website.<sup>7</sup>

CMF is working with other organisations to gather further evidence and challenge

this legislative creep. We encourage our members to keep abreast of this situation and the increasing evidence of the dangers of keeping and extending the current emergency legislation. Do pray for the safety of women and newborns to remain uppermost in the minds of legislators across the four nations.

### references (accessed 24 February 2021)

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2. Simcox G. Police investigate death of unborn baby after woman took 'pills by post' abortion drugs while 28 weeks pregnant - four past the legal limit. *Mail Online*. 23 May 2020. [bit.ly/3kycMDS](https://bit.ly/3kycMDS)
3. Abortion at Home: A Mystery Client Investigation. *Christian Concern*. 20 January 2021. [bit.ly/2Nukdkt](https://bit.ly/2Nukdkt)
4. Hospital Treatments for Complications from Early Medical Abortion. *Percuity Limited*. 15 February 2021. [bit.ly/3smVnla](https://bit.ly/3smVnla)
5. Overwhelming majority of Scots concerned about 'barbaric' DIY abortion in major opinion poll. *SPUC*. 21 January 2021. [bit.ly/3aSosz3](https://bit.ly/3aSosz3)
6. The Abortion Act 1967 - Approval of a Class of Places. *Department of Health and Social Care*. 30 March 2020. [bit.ly/35v1FQC](https://bit.ly/35v1FQC)
7. [cmf.org.uk/advocacy/submissions](https://cmf.org.uk/advocacy/submissions)

## End of life developments

### *BMA poll and Irish bill yet again put pressure to legalise assisted suicide in the UK*

Review by **Mark Pickering**  
CMF Chief Executive

Pressure to legalise assisted suicide continues. The BMA members' poll, taken in February 2020 but only released in October 2020, is very significant, representing the views of 29,000 BMA members. As noted at the time: '40 per cent of respondents wanted the BMA to actively support attempts to change the law to legalise assisted suicide, 33 per cent favoured opposition, and 21 per cent felt the BMA should adopt a neutral position.'<sup>1</sup>

Behind those headlines lies more nuanced detail. Students and retired doctors (ie those not making clinical decisions) were most likely to support legalising assisted suicide, while those in specialities such as palliative and elderly care (where regular end of life discussions and decisions take place) were least likely to support law change. Nevertheless, this is the first time that a formal UK medical poll has put legalising assisted suicide as its most favoured choice.

The results do not change BMA policy, leaving the Association in an uncomfortable

limbo. With COVID-19 cancelling the usual four-day annual meetings for both 2020 and 2021, it is still uncertain when the BMA will be able to give these results the proper attention to debate and agree a policy.

Meanwhile, heavy pressure continues in both Westminster and Holyrood. Another bill is expected soon after the Scottish elections in May. Supporters of assisted suicide in Westminster regularly put questions to ministers, call for reviews, and lay plans for either amending government bills or placing a private members bill. Continual vigilance is required, but we are encouraged by a renewed degree of collaboration between our partner groups and both MPs and Peers who oppose the legalisation of assisted suicide.

The Republic of Ireland's 'Dying with Dignity' Bill<sup>2</sup> is currently at committee stage in the Irish Parliament, the *Oireachtas*. Even more worryingly, the bill extends eligibility to those 'resident on the island of Ireland' for one year. This would include UK citizens living in Northern Ireland and

would therefore bring in assisted suicide to part of the UK without ever passing in a UK Parliament or Assembly! The bill is currently considering submissions by a range of groups, including CMF.<sup>3</sup> We must pray that Irish lawmakers will at least amend that clause, and hopefully reject the bill as a whole.

We urge CMF members to pray and engage with colleagues, politicians, and the BMA as appropriate. Contact [jennie.pollock@cmf.org.uk](mailto:jennie.pollock@cmf.org.uk) to get more involved or to sign up for our regular Public Policy e-News.

### references (accessed 1 March 2021)

1. Fouch S. The headline figures don't tell the whole story in the BMA assisted suicide poll. *CMF Blogs*, 9 October 2020. [cmf.li/3nvMdk1](https://cmf.li/3nvMdk1)
2. Dying with Dignity Bill 2020. *Tithe an Oireachtas*, 21 October 2020. [bit.ly/3kAAFLP](https://bit.ly/3kAAFLP)
3. Thomas R. Committee on Justice, Irish Government: Dying with Dignity Bill 2020. Submission by CMF, 1 February 2021. [cmf.li/3ri0Zgg](https://cmf.li/3ri0Zgg)