

## **Doctors for Choice UK response to Government of Gibraltar command paper on abortion – 28<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Doctors for Choice UK are a group of UK based doctors and medical students committed to comprehensive, evidence-based reproductive healthcare who trust women to make their own decisions about their reproductive health, including whether or not to have an abortion, and who campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK.

We believe that the highly restrictive abortion laws in Gibraltar, where abortion is governed by the outdated and grossly archaic Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (as in Northern Ireland) are an infringement of basic human rights and gender equality. This view is supported by the recent Supreme Court ruling in relation to abortion law in Northern Ireland.

Doctors for Choice UK wholly supports proposals to reform abortion law in Gibraltar and feel that any moves to bring the rights of women in Gibraltar in line with most of the UK should be welcomed. We believe however that the proposed changes, which are based on the Abortion Act 1967 with alterations including stricter gestation limits, should be revised. Doctors for Choice UK are in fact campaigning for decriminalisation of abortion in the UK as the Abortion Act 1967 is now outdated and prevents best care. Current abortion law:

### **1 Prevents good clinical care**

- By causing unnecessary delays in treatment and interruptions in consultations because of the requirement for two doctors' signatures
- By preventing nurses and midwives from being fully involved in abortion care

### **2 Infringes women's autonomy**

- The requirement that every abortion is authorised by two doctors runs contrary to the concept of patient autonomy

### **3 Contributes to abortion stigma**

- The use of criminal law in healthcare sends a message of strong social disapproval

### **4 Can be used to try to limit women's access to abortion**

- By attacking abortion law in Parliament (over 40 attempts in the last 50 years)
- By attacking doctors who provide abortions.

Furthermore, we believe that the proposed time limit in Gibraltar for most abortions of 10/12/14 weeks is restrictive and unfairly discriminates against more vulnerable women. Although we know that most abortions in the UK are in fact performed at earlier gestations (90% of abortions performed in 2017 were under 13 weeks gestation) some women do need abortions at later gestations for reasons such as failure to recognise the pregnancy, difficulties in accessing care, change in personal circumstances and when a woman is more vulnerable women such as non-

English speaking women, women in abusive relationships or with mental health problems. These women should not be denied necessary medical care.

Decriminalisation of abortion is supported by numerous professional medical bodies including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health, the British Medical Association and The Royal College of Midwives. Furthermore, abortion in Canada was decriminalised in 1988, where abortion is treated like any other medical procedure.