**Doctors for Choice UK Position Statement**

**Abortion for fetal abnormality**

The Abortion Act 1967 currently permits abortion in the UK at any gestation of pregnancy if there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from ‘such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.’ Despite advances in antenatal screening and diagnostic tests, most fetal abnormalities are not detected until the 18-20 week scan, with some serious conditions not being diagnosed until the third trimester.

Doctors for Choice UK are opposed to removal of fetal abnormality as grounds for abortion or any restriction on time limits for fetal abnormality.

We believe that:

* Women and their partners do not take the decision to end, what in most cases is a wanted pregnancy, lightly. They make the painful choice do so after careful consideration of what the diagnosis may mean for their child’s quality of life as well as for themselves and their family’s future.
* Following the diagnosis of a severe fetal abnormality, women and their partners should have access to all relevant information necessary for them to make the decision to continue with the pregnancy or seek an abortion.
* Women and their partners should be treated in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner and have access to specialist support (including the offer of counselling) whether they decide to continue with the pregnancy or seek an abortion.
* Any time limit for abortion in the case of serious fetal abnormality would cause additional distress at what is already a difficult time and risk rushed decision-making, which may even lead to some fetuses being aborted when more time, information and support might have resulted in a decision to continue the pregnancy. Furthermore, for conditions not diagnosed until the third trimester; a 24 week abortion time limit would mean forcing women to carry these pregnancies to term.

Having the choice to decide to have an abortion following a diagnosis of severe or fatal fetal abnormality does not discriminate against persons with disabilities.\*

* + - When women and their partners decide to have a termination for fetal anomaly they do not seek to denigrate those living with disabilities, but are making the decision for their own reasons in their individual circumstances
    - Anti-discriminatory legislation is applicable to born persons, not the fetus in utero, with birth being the start-point of human rights
    - It does not violate the right of a person with a disability to not face discrimination and to have access to the care and resources they need

\*In 2016 the disabled political journalist Dr Frances Ryan stated that, “Forcing a woman to bring to term a disabled foetus against her will is not the way to support disabled people”, and that “any progress made in disability rights should never be off the back of women’s”.