

SPUC briefing on Louise Mensch abortion counselling amendment, 6 September 2011

In response to the [government's rejection](#) late last week of the [Dorries-Field amendment on abortion counselling](#), [Louise Mensch](#) MP has tabled her own amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill to be debated this week. Mrs Mensch says:

- "The aim [of my amendment] is to satisfy pro-choice [\[link\]](#) ... to make sure every pro-choice objection to the Field/Dorries amend[ment]s are answered." [\[link\]](#)
- "[C]ounselling would have to include abortion advice (how, when, medical) so many [Christians] might opt out." [\[link\]](#)
- "[I]f they cannot offer neutral advice on abortions they shouldn't be counsellors, by definition they must explore all options" [\[link\]](#)

The first part of the Mensch amendment requires the government to provide for:

"timely counselling services for women requesting termination of pregnancy, to include:

(i) the option of counselling by a neutral organisation, with the NHS considered the preferred provider;

(ii) the additional choice of referral to any British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy registered service

[t]o the extent the clinical commissioning group considers they will choose to use them."

The second part of the Mensch amendment interprets the word "neutral" in the first part:

"In this section, an organisation is neutral where it is neither faith-based nor ideologically based and is not a private body which itself provides for termination of pregnancies. Timely refers to a timeframe set by the commissioning authority, but which shall not unduly delay a woman's decision."

Sub-section (i) will not secure good counselling for women, because:

- The NHS is not "neutral": it is the UK's main provider of abortions, both directly (by performing abortions) and indirectly (by contracting-out state-funded abortions to Marie Stopes, BPAS etc)
- About so-called "neutral" counsellors Mrs Mensch has said: ["counselling would have to include abortion advice \(how, when, medical\) ... \[Counsellors\] must explore all options"](#)
- The reference to "faith-based" and "ideologically based" organisations will be used to further exclude and defame pro-life counsellors. Mrs Mensch [said](#) that her original draft amendment would have required pro-life counsellors to be clearly labelled as "faith-based" or "ideologically based" and as opposed to

abortion. Mrs Mensch [said](#) that her draft language requiring such labelling was rejected by Parliament's Table Office as too complex, but that she [intends](#) to raise the labelling proposal in debate. This is clearly seeking to police pro-life crisis pregnancy centres, a priority for the pro-abortion lobby. She said that ["religious organisations' advice should certainly be monitored"](#) and pro-life counsellors ["must stick to \[statutory\] guidance"](#), which Mrs Mensch says would be "mandatory to cover all relevant topics etc. [The] Sec[retary of] State [for Health would] draw up and enforce [the guidance]." [\[link\]](#) Official guidance on abortion often promotes abortion beyond legal permission.

- As with the Dorries-Field amendment, there is nothing in the Mensch amendment which would prevent private abortion providers from counselling women, including setting-up so-called "independent" counselling services claiming to be "neutral". Indeed, Mrs Mensch has said that she believes that BPAS and Marie Stopes ["offer impartial advice"](#) whilst pro-life organisations ["clearly ha\[ve\] an ideological agenda"](#).

Sub-section (ii) of the Mensch amendment achieves nothing as both pro-abortion and pro-life counsellors can be registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

The reference to "timely" counselling services "which shall not unduly delay a woman's decision" could easily be used to continue to fast-track women through the abortion process. Health providers can thereby omit facilitating counselling by arguing that it will cause a bottleneck, with pro-abortion GPs also arguing that pro-life counsellors "unduly delay a woman's decision".

As with the Dorries-Field amendment, the Mensch amendment only requires the government to enable counselling services "to the extent the clinical commissioning group considers [women] will choose to use them". So pro-abortion doctors can continue to downplay the need for counselling services by claiming that there is little demand for them.

In short, the Mensch amendment is even worse than the dangerous Dorries-Field amendment.