

FSRH Response to Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) 2017

The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) would like to submit the following responses to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse:

5) How effectively are organisations and people held to account for the effective prevention of child sexual abuse in healthcare settings?

FSRH believes that accountability should ultimately rest at an organisational level as individual failings can be the result of wider organisational issues and flaws. This should be reflected in procedures to prevent child sexual abuse in healthcare settings.

7) What do you see as being the major opportunities for organisations in the health sector to prevent the sexual abuse of children in healthcare settings?

Relationships and Sex Education

FSRH welcomed the government decision earlier this year to introduce statutory Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools across the UK. We believe that this will be a major opportunity to help prevent the sexual abuse of children in all settings, including in healthcare settings. Starting age appropriate SRE from a young age has been shown to cultivate a positive attitude in young people towards their sexuality and relationships, equipping them to make confident, informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and will enable them to understand what is and what is not appropriate behaviour from the people around them.

We also believe there should be a co-ordinated multi-agency approach focussed on prevention and victim support. This approach should start from a young age, educating young people about domestic and sexual violence in all of its forms and their right to a violence-free life. Ensuring that these issues are covered in RSE is an essential opportunity to help prevent the sexual abuse of children in healthcare settings as well as in wider efforts to prevent sexual abuse everywhere. Organisations in the health sector should therefore be engaging with the development of RSE where possible in order to ensure that the guidelines reflect the concerns of the health sector.

Cultivating an environment of trust/ CSE risk assessment tools

Moreover, many of our members routinely work with young people to address their sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) needs and work hard to cultivate an environment of trust where young people feel comfortable making disclosures that may extend beyond SRH, concerning their wider safety.

In particular, FSRH actively supports the introduction of CSE risk assessment tools to aid frontline healthcare professionals in their assessment of potential risk. One such tool has been developed by the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) and Brook with support from FSRH. It is called "[Spotting the Signs](#)" and consists of a proforma that allows SRH professionals to use a standardised approach to identifying young people who may be at risk of or experiencing CSE. Spotting the Signs is funded by the Department of Health and was piloted in a range of services including GUM clinics, specialist young people's services and General Practice.

8) What needs to happen to ensure that organisations in the health sector best protect children receiving health care and treatment from being sexually abused?

FSRH believes that a nature of openness and honesty must be maintained in the health sector. One of the best ways to protect young people is to protect their right to access confidential sexual health services whilst supporting health care professionals to be able to identify whether young people might be at risk of harm or exploitation and to be trained in how to proceed with this information. In order to protect SRH and other health services as spaces where children and young people can talk freely and honestly, safeguarding measures must be enforced and there should be statutory measures where young people can feel assured that appropriate action, and not blanket reporting, will be taken when there is reasonable cause to suspect they are at risk, thereby preserving and promoting trust between young people and healthcare professionals. This will not only aid professionals to reach a more informed judgement as to a young person's risk of abuse, but also help to support young people to feel confident in accessing SRH services. Maintaining the confidentiality of services for young people is vital for ensuring trust and encouraging engagement with sexual health services.

For more information please contact:

Harry Walker
Head of External Affairs and Standards
FSRH
27 Sussex Place
London, NW1 4TG

Email: externalaffairshead@fsrh.org

Telephone: [REDACTED]