

Briefing from Sands on Improving Miscarriage Care

Scottish Government debate, 6th February 2025

Introduction

We welcome the [motion on Improving Miscarriage Care](#) submitted by Jenni Minto MSP, to ensure that everyone affected by pregnancy loss before 24 weeks gets the high-quality care and support they need.

The loss of a baby, no matter what stage of pregnancy, is a traumatic event that can have a profound impact on parents and families. Sands will continue to work with the Scottish Government, and all NHS Boards in Scotland, to improve the quality and consistency of care for everyone affected by pregnancy loss.

Currently, people use different statistics around miscarriage risk. We say that 15 in every 100 pregnancies ends in miscarriage, meaning that 15% of pregnancies end in miscarriage.¹ Pregnancy and baby loss, at any stage of pregnancy, has a huge impact on those affected and can be an extremely isolating and lonely experience. The [National Bereavement Care Pathway Scotland project](#) funded by Scottish Government, and delivered in partnership with Sands, provides dedicated, evidence-based care pathways designed for all healthcare professionals and staff who are involved in the care of bereaved families at all stages of pregnancy and baby loss – including miscarriage.

It's important to recognise that across the UK, Scotland have taken a very proactive approach to improving support and care for bereaved parents, following pregnancy and baby loss. Scotland were the first nation to introduce baby loss certificates and are the only nation to have mandated the NBCP.

The grief of pregnancy loss can remain with parents throughout their lives. Government must focus their attention on ensuring bereaved parents receive the care and support they need following a miscarriage and to consider what steps can be taken to save babies' lives and reduce the number of miscarriages happening every year.

National Bereavement Care Pathway (NBCP)

It is essential that all bereaved parents can receive the care and support they need. In Scotland, the government has mandated the NBCP, meaning that all 14 health boards have now adopted the standards and pathways and are currently working on implementation. The positive impact the NBCP is having for both bereaved parents and healthcare staff has been [evaluated in a recent report](#), with 82% of healthcare professionals agreeing that it has helped to raise the profile of effective bereavement care in their Board.

¹ [Miscarriage statistics | Sands - Saving babies' lives. Supporting bereaved families.](#)

However, Health Boards will need long term commitments to support the full implementation of the NBCP standards, including funding and guidance. Particularly ensuring:

- **Access to bereavement spaces for all bereaved parents.**
Whilst bereavement suites are usually available for parents' experiencing stillbirth or neonatal death in maternity units, similar spaces not always available in A&E or gynaecology wards.
- **Bereavement care training for all staff who meet bereaved parents.**
Sadly, we know that some staff are not being given the time they need by Boards to access training – including staff delivering early pregnancy care. Sonographers are also much less likely to have undertaken training.

We have also heard examples of significant delays between women and birthing people being seen in A&E for a suspected miscarriage and then waiting up to 3 days for referral to Early Pregnancy Assessment Services. Health boards must consider what work they can do to reduce these delays and offer more direct access to EPAS.

Questions to Raise:

1. **To ask how the Scottish Government will support health boards and hospitals to create specialist bereavement spaces, especially in A&E and gynecology services, to give parents experiencing all types of pregnancy and baby loss the privacy they need.**
2. **To ask the Scottish Government if they will issue guidance to Health Boards on the importance of releasing all staff who care for bereaved families to attend bereavement care training during working hours.**
3. **To ask the Scottish Government what assessment they have made of the adequacy of access to Early Pregnancy Assessment Services for all pregnant women and birthing people.**

Miscarriage Data Collection

Alongside improving miscarriage care, governments across the UK must have a focus on reducing the number of babies dying. But to do this for miscarriage, we need a better understanding of the number of miscarriages happening.

We welcome, that following a scoping report in 2023, work is well underway in Scotland to establish routine miscarriage data collection in the maternity setting. Whilst separate work is underway to secure access to data held in primary care for national analysis.²

² [Counting miscarriages in the UK - Sands And Tommys Joint Policy Unit](#)

Once we have a better understanding of the number of miscarriages, there must be annual reporting on miscarriage rates. This will enable government to monitor whether rates are decreasing or increasing.

This information would also enable Scotland to introduce an outcome-based target to reduce the miscarriage rate. The setting of ambitious targets helps to focus decision makers and enables an assessment of the effectiveness of existing policy interventions. In England, the national maternity safety ambition to reduce rates of stillbirth and neonatal deaths by 2025, relative to 2010 rates, resulted in a 23.5% reduction in stillbirths and a 25% reduction in neonatal deaths by 2022.³

We believe that all nations across the UK should consider adopting outcome-based targets including reducing stillbirths, neonatal deaths and (once routine data collection on miscarriages is established) a target to reduce the miscarriage rate.

Questions to Raise:

- 4. To ask Scottish Government for an update on work to establish routine miscarriage data collection in the maternity setting.**
- 5. To ask Scottish Government for an update on work to secure access to data held in primary care on miscarriage for national analysis.**
- 6. If the Scottish Government if they will commit to implementing outcome-based targets to reduce baby deaths, including reducing miscarriage rates once data collection has been established.**

About Sands

At Sands, we work to save babies' lives and ensure that anyone affected by pregnancy or baby loss gets the care and support they need. We provide trauma informed bereavement support as well as providing a safe, understanding and caring community for anyone who needs us. We support and promote research to better understand the causes of baby deaths and save babies' lives. We equip healthcare professionals with the skills and knowledge they need to deliver compassionate care to parents in their time of need. We raise awareness of baby loss and work with governments, the NHS and healthcare professionals to make saving babies' lives and improving bereavement care a priority. We are the voice of bereaved parents at a national level.

Contact: Public Affairs and Campaigns Team at Sands, campaigns@sands.org.uk

³ [Towards the best: Future maternity safety ambitions to save more babies' lives - Sands And Tommys Joint Policy Unit](#)