

Since our last Newsletter in Autumn 2019 we have all experienced many changes to the way we work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately the pandemic has also got in the way of us both finding the time to write a more regular Newsletter so please accept our apologies for this. Whilst we are still a small society, our membership numbers are growing and this is partly due to changes in the law in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – we extend a warm welcome to all our new members and especially those working in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

COVID-19 has meant many changes in practice for abortion services; some of them very welcome such as allowing women to take both mifepristone and misoprostol in the safety and comfort of their own homes; others not so welcome, such as the reduction in availability in surgical abortions that our membership have reported to us.

As BSACP is now seen as the 'go to' society of abortion care within the UK, Council members have been busy working alongside other national organisations in helping shape policy and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are listed some of the activities and initiatives that we have worked on since our last Newsletter. Links and further information can be found on the COVID-19 Resource page on our website at: <https://bsacp.org.uk/resources/covid-19-advice/>

- Consulting with the Government to permit the use of both mifepristone and misoprostol at home in England, Scotland and Wales following the relevant national approvals.
- BSACP Council members have been instrumental in writing the joint Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)/BSACP/Royal College of Midwives (RSM) abortion care guidelines during COVID-19 and regularly updating them. The most recent revision includes the need to prioritise abortion care as essential and urgent and not to require prior COVID-19 testing or self-isolation.
- Several new webinars – these are also available to members on the BSACP website, and include some on key topics concerning the pandemic that are also available to non-members.
- Ongoing advocacy work alongside other organisations – e.g. in decriminalisation, creation of buffer zones, briefing supportive MPs and Lords.
- BSACP Council have responded to a number of public consultations including the Health and Social Care Enquiry “Delivering Core NHS and Care Services during the Pandemic and Beyond”, the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry “Unequal Impact: Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the Impact on People with Protected Characteristics”, the Government’s Consultation on “A New Legal Framework for Abortion Services in Northern Ireland”, and the Home Office consultation on abortion clinic protests.
- Biannual Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) Training Course at the RCOG – this course is always fully subscribed. Unfortunately, the September 2020 course has had to be deferred until 3 February 2021: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/departmental-catalog/Departments/training-courses/2309---manual-vacuum-aspiration---september-2020/>
- Development of a number of BSACP Position Statements on topics that are important to members and on which the Society is often asked to comment. Completed Position Statements, on topics such as remote consultations and providing genuine choice, can be found at: <https://bsacp.org.uk/resources/bsacp-position-statements/> with more planned/in the pipeline.

- Representation at national review meetings into abortion care during COVID-19 that include the major stakeholders of government, NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I), Care Quality Commission (CQC), RCOG, RCM, FSRH, and so on. These have been essential to ensure evidence is presented at a time when false information and rumours are being circulated to the press by anti-abortion groups.
- Liaison with the RCOG in the development of the new RCOG curriculum for core training and advanced skills module in abortion care.
- Representation on the Government's Northern Ireland abortion scheme oversight group, at the RCOG Abortion Taskforce and with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).
- Work with the NHS speciality commissioning team to develop a nationally funded pathway for complex cases, alongside work to deliver workforce and training needs. The funding for this has now been fully approved and is from new, centrally provided funds. This will start by supporting five existing centres (located in London (three), Birmingham and Newcastle) to deliver late abortions to the legal limit where there are co-morbidities.
- Both BSACP Co-Chairs are involved as committee members for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Abortion Care Quality Standards – COVID-19 has delayed this process but the draft Standards are due to go out for consultation imminently.
- BSACP Council members took part in an All Party Parliamentary Group webinar on COVID-19, abortion care and contraception.
- Co-ordinating a major cohort study to investigate the safety and effectiveness of telemedicine.
- Looking at new ways of attracting Society membership including Associate Membership schemes and Associate Sponsorship schemes.

We are also very pleased that despite COVID-19 we have managed to organise our joint annual conference with the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) on Monday 12 October 2020. This event will obviously be held using via remote technology (rather than face-to-face) and further details will be posted soon on both the BSACP and RSM websites. We are very excited by the programme, which will include renowned speakers – both national and international – and smaller, interactive sessions.

As always, BSACP exists to support its membership. We know how passionate and enthusiastic our members are, and how there are many ways in which the Society could develop to help members in their work. We really want to encourage anyone who has an interest to become more actively involved – there is no 'inner circle' or elite, and there is always room for anyone with time and enthusiasm to spare. So please, if there are any ways in which you think the Society should develop or any areas in which you could offer assistance, do get in touch.

Joanne Fletcher and Jonathan Lord
BSACP Co-Chairs
August 2020