

Response to the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales Update following One Day Inquiry into Stillbirths

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This report shows significant progress against the recommendations made by the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales following the One-day Inquiry into Stillbirths in 2013. However, there are some areas that still require improvement. In some cases, these may be addressed by ventures being developed in other regions of the UK.

Recommendation 4 - The 1000 Lives campaign and the Welsh Initiative for Stillbirth Reduction have been established and have been active and involved in meetings that I have attended including two in Scotland. The establishment of a clinical network is welcome and the appointment of a clinical champion as outlined in the response (obstetrician) is essential. Despite having relevant basic science research I note that neither of the medical schools in Wales have a clinical chair in Obstetrics. This deprives the country of an established academic leader who could support the clinical champion and initiate relevant research projects in Wales. Importantly, research projects in this field frequently have a positive effect on health outcomes i.e. reduce stillbirth. As demonstrated by the AFFIRM study, Wales can be an active participant in research.

Recommendations 7 and 8 - The North West Strategic Clinical Network has developed an Integrated Care Pathway for Stillbirth and Guideline to ensure that parents have the same access to investigations to determine why their baby died. This includes information for parents about investigations (particularly post-mortem) and provision of a care pathway. This guideline and care package came into being following shortcomings identified during the Confidential Inquiry into Perinatal Deaths in Cumbria (Commissioned by NHS Cumbria, Solutions for Public Health, 2013). The results of the investigations inform perinatal audit. If the Health and Social Care Committee wish, this guideline and care package can be distributed and used for the health boards in Wales.

Recommendation 9 - The recommendation that the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales should "commission a comprehensive piece of work on the underlying causes of stillbirth" is not fully addressed by cooperation with the AFFIRM study. The AFFIRM study is an intervention study, a stepped-wedge cluster randomised controlled trial, to test whether giving information about fetal movements to women and staff and introducing a standardised protocol for the management of reduced fetal movements reduces stillbirth. The participating of maternity units in Wales is a hugely welcome step and hopefully paves the way for more national clinical trials. However, this doesn't address the underlying causes of stillbirth. This will be fulfilled in part by robust perinatal audit suggested in recommendation 7. To address the underlying causes identified by audit (e.g. fetal growth restriction, placental insufficiency), focussed clinical studies are needed to develop the basic scientific research undertaken in Wales to inform relevant clinical trials.

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