

Demonstrations (Abortion Clinics) Bill

House of Commons: Second Reading
Friday 25 September 2020

[About the BMA](#)

The BMA (British Medical Association) is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

The BMA believes exclusion zones need to be introduced outside confidential abortion services to prevent the unacceptable harassment and intimidation of patients and staff.

[The intimidation and harassment of staff and patients outside abortion services](#)

The BMA appreciates that there is a wide range of views about abortion, and that there must be opportunities for these diverse and strongly held views to be heard. However, intimidating staff who are providing a lawful and necessary health service, and approaching women accessing these services who may already feel vulnerable, are unacceptable ways to promote anti-abortion views.

Staff, women, and those accompanying women should not have to encounter harassing and intimidating behaviour when they are entering premises which provide confidential health services. Yet we are aware of anti-abortion picketers harassing women in a variety of different ways, including filming individuals approaching clinics which provide abortion services; providing grossly erroneous information about clinical risks, such as linking abortion with breast cancer; and shouting 'murderers' outside services (audible inside treatment areas).

It has been suggested that there are already adequate powers to stop this activity. We have serious concerns that, for a variety of reasons, including the significant resources required to exercise these powers, in some cases existing powers may not be being used, or are not adequate to deal with this situation. For example, current powers only apply to finite periods of time and for individual clinics whose local council has undergone a timely and costly process to establish protection zones – the existing powers do not protect *all* women accessing services from experiencing being filmed, shouted at, feeling unsafe or being fearful and deterred from accessing healthcare.

The BMA supports the Demonstrations (Abortion Clinics) Bill. We call on the UK Government to address this issue, at a national level, to ensure harassment and intimidation outside abortion services can be stopped swiftly and straightforwardly for the protection of staff and patients.

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