

NEWS



Improve reporting of female genital mutilation, MPs tell doctors

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London

Doctors must be encouraged to report cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) to tackle what is still a woefully under-reported crime, MPs have claimed.

In a report¹ based on their follow-up inquiry on FGM published by the parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee on 14 March, MPs said that “buck passing” for failure to prosecute the crime had to stop.

The profile of FGM has risen because of the media, politicians, victims, and campaigners, who have made people aware of this “horrendous form of child abuse,” said MPs, but there have still been no successful prosecutions for FGM in the United Kingdom in the past 20 years. This was despite the Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham alone having recorded 1500 cases of FGM over the past five years.

The report added that an estimated 170 000 women and girls are living with FGM in the UK. “There seems to be a chasm between the amount of reported cases and the lack of prosecutions,” it said. “Someone, somewhere is not doing their job effectively.”

The royal colleges had to do more to encourage their members to report cases of FGM, said MPs. They emphasised that, given the recent case in February when Dhanuson Dharmasena, an obstetrics and gynaecology registrar, was found not guilty of performing FGM on a patient at the Whittington Hospital in

north London,² the greater reluctance to report cases could now be even greater.

Nevertheless, the committee said that it was crucial for the Royal College of General Practitioners to inform every doctor about this practice and direct them towards adequate training on how to spot FGM and deal with it.

Keith Vaz, committee chair and Labour MP for Leicester East, said, “Doctors are on the front line. Their professional organisations must do more to encourage their members to report cases of FGM. Without their active reporting of these cases, the full extent of FGM will remain hidden.

“FGM is an ongoing national scandal which is likely to have resulted in the preventable mutilation of thousands of girls. Successive governments, politicians, the police, health, education and social care sectors should all share responsibility for the failure to respond adequately to the growing prevalence of FGM in the UK.”

- 1 Home Affairs Select Committee. Female genital mutilation: follow-up. 16 March 2015. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/961/96102.htm.
- 2 Dyer C. Surgeon acquitted of carrying out female genital mutilation in a prosecution criticised by obstetricians. *BMJ* 2015;350:h703.

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