

No religious restrictions on reproductive rights

We strongly support the right of women to have legal and safe abortions and access to emergency contraception.

It is imperative that we never return to the days, before the 1967 Abortion Act, of illegal backstreet abortions when the possibility of complications such as haemorrhage, secondary infections, perforation of the uterus, and even the mother's death were so great.

Since its founding the NSS has been supportive of reproductive rights. In 1878 our founder and vice-president were prosecuted for making information about birth control accessible for working class women. A desire to restrict reproductive rights, and to control women's bodies, is a hallmark of the theocratic mind-set.

What's the problem?

A desire to restrict reproductive rights, and to control women's bodies, is a hallmark of many with a theocratic mind-set. In the UK, anti-choice groups are predominantly from the Christian right who wish to impose their extreme views on society in general. We must reject control of our lives by priests, and listen more to those in the medical profession, and to ethical philosophers, whose actions and opinions are not influenced by religious dogma.

People of all faiths and none can have disagreements on the boundaries of bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. However, one's personal religious beliefs should not be used to restrict the bodily autonomy of others. While individual religious people hold views on abortion as diverse as any others, every stage of progress in terms of reproductive health rights has been fought and challenged by religious organisations. The most virulent intimidation of, misinformation about and restrictions on reproductive rights are almost exclusively motivated by religious groups.

Some religious organisations take their objection to contraceptives beyond personal objections and seek to allow pharmacists to use their position to prevent patients having their prescriptions filled. As a result, emergency contraception can sometimes be difficult to obtain. Some pharmacists have refused to sell it or even to dispense a prescription given to a woman after a consultation with her own doctor. We deeply regret that these pharmacists are invoking "conscientious" reasons for denying help to women who urgently need their professional cooperation if unwanted pregnancies are to be avoided.

We believe that any pharmacist who has religious objections to contraceptives has the responsibility to make sure they take personal and professional responsibility for choosing an appropriate place of work and that they're not a lone worker when such requests might arise.

The UK 1967 Abortion Act allows doctors to conscientiously object to participation in treatment. Some religious organisations have sought to allow religious healthcare professionals to block abortion by opting out of tasks peripheral to abortion, such as delegating to or supervising staff involved in abortions. However successive legal [judgments](#) have clarified that the right to object to participation is limited to active participation.

If a pharmacy professional is unwilling to provide a certain service, they should take steps to make sure the person asking for care is at the centre of their decision-making, so they can access the service they need in a timely manner and without hindrance.

General Pharmaceutical Council (guidance on religion, personal values and beliefs)

What are we doing?

- Following continued campaigns by the NSS and many other organisations and individuals, abortion was legalised in the Republic of Ireland in 2018, and in Northern Ireland in 2019.
- In 2016 we [responded to the General Pharmaceutical Council consultation on religion, personal values and beliefs](#). Our Secular Medical Forum was highly influential in the [revised standards of conduct for pharmacists](#), which now puts an onus of responsibility on pharmacists with conscientious objection not to obstruct patient care. We also raised the lack of access to abortion services in Northern Ireland with the United Nations, which subsequently called for a change to Northern Ireland's restrictive abortion law.
- We also [successfully campaigned](#) with others to ensure that NHS abortion services are made available, free of charge, to women travelling from Northern Ireland.
- Members of the SMF contributed to the debate which resulted in the British Medical Association adopting a policy in 2017 of support for the decriminalisation of abortion.
- Our campaign for reproductive rights for everyone also includes ensuring all children, regardless of their faith background, has access to impartial and factual sex education. [Find out more about our campaign for faith-free sex education](#).

What you can do:

[I support the right of women everywhere to have legal and safe abortions and access to emergency contraception.](#)

[Click to tweet](#)

Share

You can use the share buttons on the right to share this campaigns page with your social networks. Help show the importance of this campaign by sharing your story.

- [Share your story](#)

More information

[Anti-choice campaigners in schools](#)

Are you concerned about anti-abortion misinformation/propaganda in schools?

[Click here](#) to find out more about our work challenging inappropriate evangelism in schools.

[Click here](#) to find out more about our work for faith free sex education in schools.

For information on anti-abortion organisations in schools and their tactics, you may be interested in [this report](#) from the national young people's sexual health charity, Brook.

- [The Fruits of Philosophy trial](#)

Since our founding the NSS has been supportive of reproductive rights. In 1878 our founder and vice-president were prosecuted for making information about birth control accessible for working class women.

[Read More](#)

While you're here

Religious dogma shouldn't be interfering with your healthcare. Please consider a donation to help support our work in this area.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)