FSRH statement on PHE’s review of sexual health, reproductive health and HIV service commissioning

31st August 2017

FSRH welcomes the timely publication of Public Health England’s report “Sexual Health, Reproductive Health and HIV: A Review of Commissioning”. The report confirms the experience of our members that fragmented commissioning of services is threatening access to contraception and other sexual health services.

One of the most concerning findings is that local authorities, who commission contraception services, report it is not possible to maintain the current levels of service provision due to cuts to the public health grant.

Another alarming finding relates to gaps in the workforce. The survey found that there are critical medical vacancy gaps in SRH and general practice. This highlights an absence of investment in training healthcare professionals, including in the provision of the most effective forms of contraception – long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs). FSRH has previously highlighted the significant SRH consultant workforce shortage, reinforced by PHE’s findings, with its effects on the long-term sustainability of the system. FSRH has repeatedly called on Health Education England (HEE) and trusts to increase funding for CSRH training posts.

PHE’s report also corroborates the recent findings of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP); namely, that fragmentation of SRH service commissioning across England is leading to a decrease in services in the community. RCGP’s recent report endorsed by FSRH indicates that years of progress in SRH care, including steadily increasing uptake of LARCs, is at risk due to pressures facing primary care.

Dr Asha Kasliwal, FSRH President, said:

“The survey highlights what FSRH members have been reporting to the Faculty for several years: deep cuts to specialist SRH services and fragmented commissioning are resulting in reduced access to contraception and other SRH services.

PHE’s survey echoes FSRH’s concern that reduced capacity in general practice is leading to a reduction in the provision of complex contraception in primary care, with fewer GPs training or retaining essential skills in this area.

There is also evidence from our membership that many SRH consultants will be retiring in the near future. Safe and effective SRH care requires combined leadership from Public Health, commissioners and consultants who are trained to develop and lead services that support all aspects of care. We believe that future leaders in SRH are the cornerstone to ensure the provision of high-quality SRH services that can prevent unintended pregnancies.

FSRH agrees with PHE in that there is merit in strengthening both local and national clinical leadership within commissioning. The Faculty welcome PHE’s proposal to
work with clinical leaders, including FSRH, to develop a framework for sector/system-led improvement.”

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Notes to editors:

- The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) is the largest UK professional membership organisation working at the heart of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), supporting healthcare professionals to deliver high quality care. It works with its 15,000 members, to shape sexual reproductive health for all. It produces evidence-based clinical guidance, standards, training, qualifications and research into SRH. It also delivers conferences and publishes The Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care. For more information please visit: www.fsrh.org

- Public Health England’s report “Sexual Health, Reproductive Health and HIV: A Review of Commissioning” is available here

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