Better care, a better future: a new vision for sexual and reproductive health care in the UK
Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) matters to all of us at different points in our lives. Good SRH enables women and men to pursue their ambitions in education, work and with their families. It supports strong and successful communities.

SRH does not just cover the provision of contraception and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. It includes supporting sexual well-being, no matter an individual’s background or sexual orientation, and includes the planning of families. It begins with education and ends with encouraging post-reproductive health, truly reflecting a person’s life course. This vision supports the drive towards holistic sexual and reproductive healthcare, which operates around the needs of the individual, rather than traditional professional silos.

Our vision is not restricted to one care setting — but applies across the health sector where SRH is an element. General practice in particular has a pivotal role in promoting high quality SRH and for many will be the first point of call.

We believe that contraception should play a key role in SRH. When considering all modern healthcare interventions, effective contraception has had the most profound, positive effect on the health of women. Improved access to abortion and contraception has revolutionised women’s lives, by supporting them to take control of their reproductive health and the future of their family.

From most women’s perspective, contraception and sexual well-being are part of a continuum along with obstetric and gynaecological care. Having access to specialist SRH care is therefore essential.

In the UK, the importance of accessible, open access SRH care for everyone is well understood and supported. We are also the only country in the world with a multidisciplinary Faculty bringing together clinicians with an interest in this area — the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH).

The quality of SRH care can fall short of the standards recommended by the FSRH and others, because of the relatively low profile of SRH in the health arena. We want to ensure that high quality sexual and reproductive health sits at the heart of health and social care.

This document sets out the Faculty’s vision for those providing SRH care in the UK and describes the fundamental principles underpinning SRH provision for all, which we envisage applying across and within all four nations. It has been written for — and by — FSRH members. We hope each nation of the UK will use it, in conjunction with an implementation plan, to hold providers and commissioners to account and establish high quality sexual and reproductive health for all.

FSRH Council
November 2015
What is SRH and why is it important?

The FSRH has combined two World Health Organisation definitions to describe sexual and reproductive health:

Good sexual and reproductive health (SRH) enables women and men to pursue their ambitions in education, work and with their families.

Sexual and reproductive health care supports all people in having a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of infection, coercion, discrimination and violence; enabling them to decide if, when and how often to have children by informing them of, and providing access to, safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of contraception of their choice. It also signposts women to the necessary support and care to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth, thus maximising the chance of having a healthy infant.
High quality sexual and reproductive health at every stage of our lives

Whilst being important for society, SRH is inherently personal. Most men and women will need SRH information, care and support at some stage in their lives as illustrated in the diagram below.

Each person's needs are different and will change throughout their life. SRH care therefore needs to be accessible and individualised across the life course taking into account that some groups, such as men who have sex with men, may be at higher risk of sexual ill health. Although an individual's SRH is often a personal and private area of their lives, when things go wrong partners children and families may all be affected. Maintaining good sexual health and well-being for all people living in the UK can have profound and positive long-term effects on the individual, their family and wider society.
The principles of good sexual and reproductive health care

The FSRH believe all SRH care should be underpinned by ten principles. All SRH care should be:

1. Empowering people to lead healthy and fulfilling lives, irrespective of sexuality or lifestyle

2. Designed and delivered to place patients at the heart of their care

3. Fully-funded based on the needs of the population and the principles of an open-access service

4. Fully integrated, with those involved in SRH care working together seamlessly across organisational and medical boundaries and settings in the patient’s best interests

5. Planned and performance-managed on the basis of safety, quality, accessibility and outcomes — and not solely on the basis of cost

6. Delivered by collaborative multi-disciplinary teams with appropriate competency, training and experience — making effective use of the different skills of their members to achieve shared outcomes

7. Guided by and managed to clear, robust and consistent standards that are monitored and updated to reflect the best evidence and recommendations available

8. Evidence-based, supported by a research infrastructure and funding

9. Evaluated according to the quality of care and the outcomes delivered including the expectations and experience of the users and potential users of a service

10. Led by clinicians who are able to provide leadership to all aspects of care and who are committed to collaborative and cross organisational working to improve care for the individual and the wider population
Our vision for sexual and reproductive health care

The FSRH believe that everyone has a right to expect individualised, holistic sexual and reproductive health care throughout their lives. This means:

▶ Every healthcare professional and member of staff providing SRH care, wherever it is delivered, will treat patients with kindness and respect. All care and support will be provided in a non-judgemental way irrespective of sexuality and behaviour
▶ Any personal and clinical information provided to healthcare professionals will be treated confidentially
▶ All information will be accurate to people of all sexual orientations, up to date and easily available in a format that can be understood and help individual decision making including about contraceptive care, pregnancy choices and sexual health
▶ Easily accessible information about local SRH services will be available. These will provide open access care, including extended hours opening. This is especially important when seeking emergency contraception, support for sexual assault or access to post exposure prophylaxis after sexual exposure to HIV
▶ The full range of contraceptive options should be offered with the opportunity to discuss how different contraceptives work on a one to one basis with a trained professional
▶ There should be no fear of harassment or stigma when consulting with healthcare professionals or visiting clinical premises, for example for those requesting an abortion or emergency contraception
▶ Healthcare professionals should work as a team. Where they are not able or qualified to provide a type of care themselves, for example fitting of long-acting reversible contraception or providing specialist gynaecological care, there should be rapid referral to someone who can
▶ Patients have the right to see a trained healthcare professional, with opportunities to be referred elsewhere when their needs are beyond the scope of what is available at that service
▶ Integrating care around the needs of the individual, not institutional silos, with people able to get integrated/holistic advice and support across the breadth of SRH including contraception and STI testing and treatment
▶ Patient being given every opportunity to feed back their wants and experiences of care and support, and be confident that this will be listened to and acted upon
▶ All healthcare professionals, whatever their area of medicine, have an awareness of the impact of their treatment or intervention on a person’s reproductive health.
Our vision is not complex and its principles are not unique to SRH. All too often, however, cultural and institutional barriers mean we expect the person to fit the medical model rather than the medical model fitting the person. This can lead to a fragmented experience of care and unnecessary delays in the pathway. Our vision presents a roadmap for how this can be overcome and the FSRH will be developing ‘implementation plans’ for each country in the UK to demonstrate what is needed. Ensuring that women and men get consistently high quality SRH care also requires:

- Good education, training and continuous professional development of healthcare professionals, including the FSRH’s training and competency programme for the provision of SRH
- Investment in training and research for SRH professionals
- Evidence-based clinical guidance and care standards, including guidelines developed by the FSRH, RCOG and BASHH on different aspects of SRH care
- Established local or regional networks of care that share common goals, have clear leadership and cross institutional boundaries to span health, public health and social care
- Professionals outside SRH services to have the information they need about SRH care so they can refer to these services.
The FSRH and our role in realising the vision

Realising the vision of high quality SRH care everywhere requires clear support and guidance, tailored to the different systems operating in the nations of the UK, to be put in place. We are working with our members, and with other organisations sharing our ambitions, to:

▶ Set out the practical ways to make the vision a reality for every man or woman who needs SRH support and care
▶ Explore what we can do to provide support and guidance for those responsible for overseeing service provision at a population-level, as well as those providing daily care on the front line
▶ Examine how we can monitor performance against the principles outlined in this vision and the recommendations in the national plans.

We know that we alone cannot deliver our vision, but the FSRH is committed to leading efforts to improve the consistency and quality of SRH care available. We are keen to partner wherever possible and extend an open invitation to all interested organisations and individuals who share this vision to work with us.

The FSRH is a multi-disciplinary membership faculty, consisting of over 15,000 healthcare professionals across the UK. We exist to:

▶ Maintain and develop standards of care and training, ensuring that high quality practice is maintained by all providers of SRH care for the benefit of patients
▶ Encourage improvements in quality through training, accreditation, audit and research
▶ Provide a voice for professionals involved in SRH.

As clinical leaders, we also advocate for safe and high quality SRH care to be readily accessible and delivered well across health and other care settings: in the community, in general practice and within hospitals. Our members have created this vision for how we want SRH care to evolve to meet the needs of women and men across the UK, both now and in the future.
Contact us

For more information about this vision and the work of the FSRH, please contact:

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