

## **Pregnancy charities tackling taboo around termination for medical reasons**

**15 September 2020**

3 national pregnancy charities have teamed up to end the stigma around termination for medical reasons (TFMR) and improve support for the thousands of families affected.

When a baby is diagnosed with a serious genetic or physical condition in the womb, or a mother has pregnancy complications that pose a significant threat to either of their lives, parents face the heart-breaking decision of whether to continue the pregnancy or have a TFMR.

At least 5,000 pregnancies a year in the UK end due to TFMR – but the persistent taboo in society can mean that families keep it secret, in fear of other people's reactions. Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC), Petals and Tommy's have joined forces with a new partnership aiming to change this.

The charities warn that TFMR being shrouded in secrecy even more than other types of pregnancy and baby loss often leaves people struggling through this traumatic experience completely alone, which can have serious consequences for their mental health.

A [2019 Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance report](#) found 60% of bereaved parents felt they needed specialist psychological support, and almost 1 in 7 of Petals' counselling referrals relate to TFMR. As well as the specialist counselling offered by Petals, Tommy's and ARC provide secure online communities for people to connect with others who have been through similar.

Despite needing this support, those affected by TFMR can be reluctant to reach out, struggling with complicated feelings around having made a decision and sometimes fearing judgement. ARC, Petals and Tommy's have come together to tackle this issue and ensure that nobody has to face the trauma of TFMR alone.

Tommy's Policy & Research Director, Lizzie D'Angelo, said: "Although 1 in 4 pregnancies ends in loss, the stigma and silence around it means people can feel incredibly alone in their grief – something made worse by the current pandemic.

"Families who experience termination for medical reasons often feel excluded from the wider baby loss community, increasing their isolation. That's why Tommy's is delighted to partner with Petals and ARC to build a more inclusive baby loss community, which reflects the range of personal experiences and better supports families through the challenges they face."

Petals' Chief Executive, Karen Burgess, said, "The decision to terminate a much-wanted pregnancy is one of the most traumatic and painful decisions a parent could ever have to make. It is common for couples to feel a complicated mix of anger, panic, guilt and shame which can quite often drown out the grief they are also feeling over the loss of their child.

The specialist counselling that Petals offers supports women, men and couples talk through and process all of the complex emotions and thoughts they are experiencing after having to TFMR, enabling them to grieve for their child, adjust to their 'new normal' and find a place of hope for the future.

By joining forces with ARC and Tommy's today, we hope to open up the conversation so that TFMR is recognised as much a part of pregnancy and baby loss as any other type of loss."

ARC's Director, Jane Fisher, said, "ARC has been providing specialised information and support to women and couples who are facing or have experienced #tfmr for over 30 years but it still remains the least spoken about type of pregnancy/baby loss. We are so pleased to be working with Petals and Tommy's to help break the silence and ensure all affected can access the help they may need."

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to editor**

#### **About ARC**

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) offer impartial information and support around antenatal screening and its consequences ARC have provided specialised help around termination after prenatal diagnosis or scan findings for over 30 years. Their small professional helpline team offers unbiased information and individualised support to women, partners and their family and friends. They deal regularly with and help to contain the complex emotions that can be provoked by this painful loss. They provide access to password protected online forums for women and men who have experienced TFMR, contact with trained volunteer peer supporters who have lived experience and have a range of publications that can be of comfort. Although ARC cannot sustain local groups, they do run facilitated regional face to face support meetings for women and couples bereaved after TFMR and will schedule these again post COVID-19 restrictions.

ARC offers support for as long as is needed with the aim of helping people work through their loss and move on positively with their lives. For more information about ARC, visit [www.arc-uk.org](http://www.arc-uk.org) or follow them on social media @ARCantenatal

#### **About Petals**

Petals is the Baby Loss Counselling Charity. We provide free-of-charge specialist counselling to support the mental health of women, men and couples who experience pregnancy or baby loss. Our counsellors provide a safe space to guide our clients through the grief and trauma of their devastating experience to a place of reconciliation and hope for the future. Our national online video counselling service provides psychological support to people across the UK, and in some areas we also provide counselling in person, in partnership with hospital Trusts.

Find out more at [www.petalscharity.org](http://www.petalscharity.org) or follow us @petalscharity

#### **About Tommy's**

Tommy's is a national charity that works tirelessly to reduce the UK's unacceptable rates of miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth, and to break the silence around pregnancy and baby loss.

We fund pioneering medical research to discover the causes of baby loss and helps women at every stage of their pregnancy journeys, supporting them and their partners with expert information and care. We also provide a supportive community and safe space for every family who has lost a baby during pregnancy or birth, including those who have experienced TFMR, and campaign to reduce the ongoing stigma and isolation families face.

Tommy's is working to make pregnancy safer for all and ensure that excellent maternity care is available for every family, every baby, everywhere. To find out more, visit [www.tommys.org](http://www.tommys.org) or follow @tommys on social media. To speak to a Tommy's midwife, email [midwife@tommys.org](mailto:midwife@tommys.org).