# Scottish women face rising barriers as abortion services fail to meet demand beyond early pregnancy



Molly, a 19-year-old woman whose real name has been changed for privacy, recently recounted her distressing experience when she was forced to travel to England for an abortion after being denied care in Scotland. Her story highlights significant gaps in abortion service availability within Scotland, particularly for women requiring procedures beyond the early stages of pregnancy.

Molly's distress began when she visited a medical clinic in Glasgow regarding back pain, where she unexpectedly discovered that she was pregnant after taking a contraceptive injection. "I was in such shock that I threw up on myself," she told the Daily Mail. Following her diagnosis, she sought assistance at a sexual health clinic but was informed that they could not provide the necessary services. "Looking back on it, I feel angry; I felt like I was backed into a corner," she added.

In a rushed decision, she and her parents flew to London the same evening, their first trip together since separating. They incurred significant expenses, totalling over £3,000 for travel and accommodation, much of which was out-of-pocket since the NHS in Scotland did not compensate them for their expenses. Reflecting on the emotional burden, Molly noted, “I was totally let down, no one helped me.”

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has reported that at least 88 patients from Scotland were compelled to travel across the border for abortion care in the previous year, marking a 31% increase from the year before. This increase highlights a troubling trend, especially given the high costs and logistical challenges involved in such journeys. The Scottish Government permits abortions up to 24 weeks, yet many hospitals do not offer the full range of services, often ceasing at 13 weeks.

Lucy Grieve, co-founder of Back Off Scotland, expressed concern that this practice reflects a moral judgment regarding which procedures should be available locally. She stated that the limited availability of surgical abortions contravenes guidelines set by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, which advocate for women to have access to both medical and surgical options for abortion up to 24 weeks.

Dr Ed Dorman, who treats many women crossing the border for care, described a concerning trend where obstetricians and gynaecologists have reportedly lost the necessary skills for later-stage surgical procedures. This gap in service provision has implications for women’s health, posing increased risks including severe complications and maternal death.

Figures from the Scottish Government show that last year, many women were compelled to utilise services in England, typically through referral to the BPAS, which manages logistics for those seeking care too late in their pregnancy to access services at home. The NHS in Scotland has faced criticism for its handling of costs related to these situations. Reports indicate that some health boards have disputed reimbursement claims from BPAS for travel and accommodation, leaving many women vulnerable and without financial support.

Rachael Clarke, Head of Advocacy at BPAS, remarked on the emotional and financial strain placed on women needing to travel for time-sensitive healthcare. She noted, “It’s just not reasonable to expect women to come up with hundreds of pounds with a few days' notice to access time-limited healthcare.”

Scotland's Public Health Minister, Jenni Minto, acknowledged the challenges women face in accessing abortion services. She stated that her priority is patient safety and that the government is working closely with NHS Boards to improve local access to abortion services. A working group has been established to examine how surgical services for abortion can be better integrated within Scotland's healthcare framework.

Amid these ongoing discussions, concerns remain regarding the broader implications for women's health and wellbeing, particularly for those with complex personal circumstances. Grieve warned that many women may choose to continue with unwanted pregnancies due to the obstacles in accessing services, and the repercussions this can have on their mental health and overall quality of life are a pressing issue that requires immediate attention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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