

Aborted babies incinerated to heat UK hospitals

The remains of more than 15,000 babies were incinerated as 'clinical waste' by hospitals in Britain with some used in 'waste to energy' plants



More than 15,000 aborted or miscarried babies were burned as 'clinical waste' an investigation has discovered Photo: Alamy

By Sarah Knapton, Science Correspondent

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The bodies of thousands of aborted and miscarried babies were incinerated as clinical waste, with some even used to heat hospitals, an investigation has found.

Ten NHS trusts have admitted burning foetal remains alongside other rubbish while two others used the bodies in 'waste-to-energy' plants which generate power for heat.

Last night the Department of Health issued an instant ban on the practice which health minister Dr Dan Poulter branded 'totally unacceptable.'

At least 15,500 foetal remains were incinerated by 27 NHS trusts over the last two years alone, Channel 4's Dispatches discovered.

The programme, which will air tonight, found that parents who lose children in early pregnancy were often treated without compassion and were not consulted about what they wanted to happen to the remains.

One of the country's leading hospitals, Addenbrooke's in Cambridge, incinerated 797 babies below 13 weeks gestation at their own 'waste to energy' plant. The mothers were told the remains had been 'cremated.'

Another 'waste to energy' facility at Ipswich Hospital, operated by a private contractor, incinerated 1,101 foetal remains between 2011 and 2013.

They were brought in from another hospital before being burned, generating energy for the hospital site. Ipswich Hospital itself disposes of remains by cremation.

"This practice is totally unacceptable," said Dr Poulter.

"While the vast majority of hospitals are acting in the appropriate way, that must be the case for all hospitals and the Human Tissue Authority has now been asked to ensure that it acts on this issue without delay."

Sir Bruce Keogh, NHS Medical Director, has written to all NHS trusts to tell them the practice must stop.

The Chief Medical Officer, Dame Sally Davies, has also written to the Human Tissue Authority to ask them make sure that guidance is clear.

And the Care Quality Commission said it would investigate the programme's findings.

Prof Sir Mike Richards, Chief Inspector of Hospitals, said: "I am disappointed trusts may not be informing or consulting women and their families.

"This breaches our standard on respecting and involving people who use services and I'm keen for Dispatches to share their evidence with us.

"We scrutinise information of concern and can inspect unannounced, if required."

A total of one in seven pregnancies ends in a miscarriage, while NHS figures show there are around 4,000 stillbirths each year in the UK, or 11 each day.

Ipswich Hospital Trust said it was concerned to discover that foetal remains from another hospital had been incinerated on its site.

A spokeswoman said: “The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust does not incinerate foetal remains.”

She added that the trust “takes great care over foetal remains”

A spokesman for the Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said that trained health professionals discuss the options with parents ‘both verbally and in writing.’

“The parents are given exactly the same choice on the disposal of foetal remains as for a stillborn child and their personal wishes are respected,” they added.

Channel 4 Dispatches, Amanda Holden: Exposing Hospital Heartache, airs tonight (Monday March 24) at 8pm

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