Female Genital Mutilation

An RCN resource for nursing and midwifery practice
(Third edition)
Acknowledgements

For further information on FGM and this publication please contact Carmel Bagness, Professional Lead Midwifery and Women's Health, RCN Nursing Department at carmel.bagness@rcn.org.uk

Contributors to this third edition include:

Carmel Bagness, Professional Lead Midwifery and Women's Health, RCN
Jo Buckley, RCN Woman’s Health Forum and Safeguarding Adults Programme Officer, NHS England (London Region)
Julie Albert, Specialist FGM Midwife, Department of Health, FGM Prevention Programme
Astrid Fairclough, Female Genital Mutilation Prevention – Programme Manager, Department of Health
Dr Comfort Momoh, MBE, Public Health Specialist, Guy's and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust
Vanessa Lodge, Director of Nursing, North Central and East London, NHS England (London Region)
Julie Albert, Specialist FGM Midwife, Department of Health, FGM Prevention Programme
Astrid Fairclough, Female Genital Mutilation Prevention – Programme Manager, Department of Health
Dr Comfort Momoh, MBE, Public Health Specialist, Guy's and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust
Vanessa Lodge, Director of Nursing, North Central and East London, NHS England (London Region)
Debra Sohan, Maternity and Children’s Health Team, Department of Health

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Contributors to the second edition (2015)
Carmel Bagness, Professional Lead Midwifery and Women’s Health, RCN
Chris Cox, Director of Legal Services, RCN
Lizzie Dowd, Parliamentary Adviser, RCN
Vanessa Lodge, Director of Nursing, North Central and East London, NHS England (London Region)
Jackie Mathers, Designated Nurse for safeguarding Children, Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group
Wendy Norton, Senior Lecturer, De Montfort University, Leicester
Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Executive Director, Forward
Yana Richens, OBE, Consultant Midwife Public Health and Professional Global Advisor, RCM
Fiona Smith, Professional Lead Children and Young People, RCN
Dr Comfort Momoh, MBE, Public Health Specialist, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust

A full list of contributors to the 2015 edition (published in February 2015) and the first edition in 2006 can be found in Appendix 5.

This publication is due for review in April 2018. To provide feedback on its contents or on your experience of using the publication, please email publications.feedback@rcn.org.uk

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# Female Genital Mutilation

*An RCN resource for nursing and midwifery practice (Third edition)*

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Foreword

Since the second edition of these important guidelines in February 2015, real progress has been made on tackling female genital mutilation across our health system, progress in which we can all take pride. As Minister for Public Health, I have been heartened to see the improvements and changes that are already taking place and to speak with FGM survivors and dedicated professionals who have been key to the successes and improvements we have witnessed.

The Serious Crime Act (2015) ushered in some important developments; a new offence of failing to protect a girl from FGM, lifelong anonymity for FGM victims, FGM Protection Orders and the extension of the extra-territorial coverage of the FGM Act. Crucially, it also created a new statutory duty – mandatory reporting – on health care professionals, social workers and teachers who must now report to the police cases of FGM or suspected FGM involving girls under 18.

In the work we have undertaken across Government we have been fortunate to work with so many willing partners, nowhere more so than in the health system; representatives from the Royal Colleges, professional bodies and regulators, experts and FGM survivors. Their invaluable input and expertise continue to ensure that the NHS is now becoming a real exemplar of some excellent practice around FGM.

To embed this great progress across the NHS I will be looking to health professionals, commissioners, chief executives and managers to show leadership. My challenge to them is to ensure that they have the right training, continued support and systems in place to allow their staff to fulfil their duties to care for and protect women and girls. This excellent guidance is another valuable tool for health professionals, to increase their awareness of FGM, of how to respond safely and appropriately, and how to provide the best possible care not just for women living with the consequences of FGM but also for those at risk of it.

The Prime Minister’s Girl Summit in July 2014 was a significant moment in the global fight against FGM. It truly galvanised efforts to bring FGM to an end, and brought to the fore the voice of young women in this country and around the world. They represent a new generation who will continue to drive change within their communities and amongst their peers. And rightly, they will continue to demand more of us, keeping us up to the mark.

When I first started campaigning on FGM in 2010 as a backbench MP, I could not have imagined that we would be in the position that we are today, with so much achieved at such pace. Yet, we still have a very long way to go. I will continue to support health professionals however I can, building this movement for change, working towards our shared goal; to eradicate FGM here and across the globe.

Jane Ellison MP
Minister for Public Health
2016
Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Introduction

Female genital mutilation (FGM), sometimes referred to as female circumcision, is a challenging subject to understand and manage.

FGM affects the lives and health of an estimated 200 million girls and women living in countries where the practice is prevalent (UNICEF, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) identifies FGM as a violation of the human rights of girls and women as the practice is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, commonly before puberty starts, and can have long-term negative effects on their health and wellbeing. An Equality Now/City University report (Macfarlane and Dorkenoo, 2014) estimated that 137,000 women and girls affected by FGM were permanently resident in England and Wales in 2011 and 60,000 girls under 14 were born in England and Wales to mothers who had undergone FGM, and so were potentially at risk.

FGM is child abuse and the practice is illegal in the UK. The UN is clear that FGM is torture and calls for its elimination as a form of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment of girls and women (RCM, 2012). The hidden nature of the crime raises serious issues and concerns in relation to the safeguarding of girls and young women. It is vital that practitioners who come into contact with women, children and families from communities that practise FGM have an adequate knowledge and understanding of the issues in order to respond appropriately and act within contemporary legal frameworks.

The RCN guidance on this topic has now been updated to take account of recent developments. It is important to acknowledge that while some health care professionals work closely with communities that have practised FGM for generations, others may rarely come across this practice. Nevertheless, it is important everyone has some understanding of FGM in order to provide the best quality care for the women and girls they come into contact with. This will need to be managed in the context of local safeguarding procedures, which all practitioners should be familiar with.

This publication aims to raise awareness among nurses, midwives and related health care personnel about FGM, and to provide insight and understanding of the socio-cultural, legal and health issues surrounding the practice.

Reasons why FGM is practised

The World Health Organization (WHO) has described FGM as a practice that “reflects a deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women”.

FGM is related to the control of women’s sexuality and gender-based social norms relating to ‘marriageability’.

FGM is culturally-embedded, as it is viewed as a form of cultural expression among those who support it. FGM may be upheld as a religious obligation by some Muslim populations, even though the practice predates Islam and it is practised by Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional African religions.

In the UK, reasons for practising FGM may have adapted to their context, for instance, the use of FGM to curb sexuality and to preserve girls’ cultural identity, even as prevention of FGM in the country of origin gains ground. Parents may also come under pressure from family and community members in the UK or abroad to have FGM performed on their girls, and need support to avert this (RCM, 2012).

Alongside an overview of FGM and the potential harm and consequences it poses for young women, this guidance provides an outline of the context in which FGM is being managed across the UK. The guidance also provides:

- a consideration of legal and professional requirements, including the mandatory duty to
report cases of FGM in those under 18 years old, safeguarding and the importance of multi-agency working

- clarification of individual nursing and midwifery roles, and a consideration of key service provision requirements
- a review of the practice issues nurses and midwives need to understand.

**What is FGM?**

The WHO defines FGM as:

“...all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”

(WHO, 2014)

The practice has no health benefits and can often lead to serious morbidity and mortality in girls and women. The lasting physical and psychological trauma caused by FGM can have lifelong complications for the health and wellbeing of women.

FGM is also referred to as female circumcision, an expression which implies the practice is similar to male circumcision. However, the degree of cutting is far more extensive and the procedure often impairs a woman’s sexual and reproductive functions and ability to pass urine normally.

Female genital cutting is another term used to describe the practice, and many traditional societies have different names for what is defined by WHO as FGM.

When discussing FGM, it is important to understand that many women may not be aware of what has happened to them, and because of the use of a variety of local cultural terms (which often refer to purification) may not comprehend what is meant or being referred to when using certain terminology.

**Historical and cultural context**

Those who do not practise FGM generally view it as a form of abuse and violence and a clear violation of human rights. This attitude is enshrined in numerous international conventions, and agencies, human rights groups, women's groups and governments around the world are committed to eradicating the practice globally.

However, FGM remains deeply rooted within some cultures and traditions (Momoh, 2003), and it can be challenging to rationalise the beliefs that provide a vehicle for the practice to continue. Some communities view FGM as an act of love or a rite of passage and find it difficult to understand why the practice is condemned, believing they are doing the best for their daughters.

It is unclear when and where FGM first started, but reference to the procedure has been found on an Egyptian sarcophagus dating from around two thousand years ago. The practice of FGM was also documented in Britain, Canada and the USA during the 19th century when it was employed to prevent masturbation, cure hysteria and some psychiatric conditions in women (RCN, 2006).

The justifications for performing FGM are many and vary widely between individual communities, contexts and countries; in summary, motivations often relate to the control of women and their sexuality, religion, rites of passage, ideas of hygiene, femininity and aesthetics, as well as social pressures and expectations.

FGM is often erroneously linked to Islam, possibly because it is practised in communities where this religion predominates. Some Muslims believe Islam demands the practice to ensure spiritual purity, but many Islamic scholars disagree and state that there is no reference to FGM in the Qur’an or the Hadith.

In 2014, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the country’s largest Muslim organisation, condemned
FGM and for the first time issued explicit guidance which criticises the practice and makes it clear it is not supported by any religious doctrine or linked to the teaching of Islam (MCB, 2014).

In reality, FGM transcends religious, racial and social boundaries; a minority of followers of a variety of faiths including Christians, Animists and Jews (the Falashe Jews of Ethiopia) practise it (RCN, 2006).

Performing FGM is seen by some as an essential part of their culture that must be preserved (Momoh, 2005). FGM is often related to ideas about female chastity, hygiene and aesthetics, and is founded on deeply held cultural and traditional belief systems. Illiteracy, the low status of women, their lack of access to money and limited knowledge and power all help to perpetuate FGM.

In some societies FGM is believed to reduce the possibility of premarital and extra-marital sex, improving both the marriageability of ‘circumcised’ young women and increasing their dowries. Hence, in many places it is viewed as a prerequisite for marriage, which may be the only secure future for women in these societies. FGM may also be considered to promote or maintain virginity and chastity by decreasing women’s sexual enjoyment and desire for sex, as well as enhancing their partners’ or husbands’ pleasure.

The suggestion is that a closed introitus (the opening to the vagina) – also known as infibulation – in which the labia majora and sometimes the labia minora may be sewn together, is considered to provide evidence of virginity. Families therefore view FGM – and by implication, virginity – as important for maintaining their honour in society. The emphasis on ‘tightness’ may be so strong that women wish to be closed again after childbirth, or prior to remarrying if widowed or divorced. FGM may also be falsely believed to improve fertility. It should also be acknowledged that the procedure often carries high social values (Momoh, 2005).

In 2008, a global interagency statement condemned the practice of FGM, including its practice by health professionals:

“Trained health professionals who perform female genital mutilation are violating girls’ and women’s right to life, right to physical integrity, and right to health.”

(WHO, 2012)

Performing FGM is also related to ideas of femininity and masculinity, particularly when the clitoris is likened to a penis. Some communities believe that children are born with the attributes of both sexes and that it is important to ensure that a child is assigned to the appropriate sex and gender role after birth. Therefore, boys must have all feminine attributes removed – the foreskin, which is believed to be the remnants of the labia – while girls must have all

Figure 1 – Viewpoints on FGM from African communities

“I cannot trust her if she is not circumcised.”

“Female circumcision in our country has many beneficial aims like to keep the honour of the girl. But generally circumcision is not good because there is a different between circumcised women and uncircumcised women.”

“Yes, I am happy to marry uncircumcised woman.”

“The right time to open my circumcision is at night-time of marriage.”

“The type of circumcision I am going to circumcise my daughter is how the Islamic religion allows that is the sunnah.”

“Allah doesn't accept to harm one organ of human being body, and is unlawful to cut human reproductive organs.”

Quotes taken from interviews conducted by Comfort Momoh, MBE, 2006
masculine features removed – the clitoris, which is believed to be a diminutive penis. These acts are believed to ensure that each child has an unambiguous place in the society.

Aesthetics and cleanliness are other reasons put forward for performing FGM. The female genitalia may be believed to be ritually unclean or polluted; it may also be supposed that a woman’s clitoris ‘poisons’ the baby as it is born. Some cultures see uncircumcised women as bringing shame onto their families; in such societies uncircumcised women, and even girls, may be ostracised, so mothers have strong incentives to make sure their daughters undergo FGM. Many communities view FGM as a positive and normal part of their heritage and perceive continuation of the practice as an aspect of their group identity.

It is also important to recognise that the livelihood of those who carry out FGM for their communities depends on its continuance, so resistance to change may be strong. Such practitioners may also be highly respected members of society. Equally, it must be acknowledged that some health care professionals in the UK come from these communities and may have conflicting views and beliefs about FGM.

Parents who choose to refuse FGM for their daughters may come under considerable pressure from family members to conform. There is a very real fear that despite their objections, elders in the extended family will override their wishes and subject their daughters to FGM.

Prevalence

It is important to acknowledge that available data on FGM is estimated. Global statistics provided by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) suggest that FGM is on the decline, however it remains a significant threat to many girls across the globe and is deeply rooted in regions of Africa, Asia and the Middle East (RCM et al., 2013). The movement of people seeking refuge and asylum from the Horn of Africa region has led to the situation now being taken seriously in the UK. Appendix 1 maps the global prevalence of FGM.

In 2013, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2013) estimated that 125 million girls and women in Africa and the Middle East, regions where FGM is primary concentrated, are living with the consequences of having had FGM performed on them. While not all women are negatively affected by FGM, research demonstrates that large numbers are physically and psychologically damaged by this mutilation (WHO, 2012). These numbers do not account for those who have died as a direct or indirect result of having FGM performed on them, or the babies that have died following a traumatic childbirth due to complications from FGM.

In African countries, more than 90 million girls and women over the age of 10 years are estimated to have undergone FGM; according to the World Health Organization, an estimated three million girls in Africa are at risk of undergoing FGM every year (WHO, 2010).

Many girls and women die from the short-term effects of FGM which include haemorrhage, shock or infection, whilst significantly more suffer lifelong disability and may die from long-term effects such as recurrent urinary or vaginal infections. Pain during intercourse and infertility are further common consequences of FGM.

FGM increases the risk of women dying during childbirth and makes it more likely that the baby will be born dead. This increased risk can be as a result of severe bleeding and obstructed labour in places where safe and appropriate maternal health services are inadequate or inaccessible. In Somalia, where 90-98 percent of women are infibulated, one in every 100 women giving birth dies as a result of this procedure (see Figure 2 for a short narrative that expands on this point).
Although the Somali government supported the banning of FGM, such a change could no longer be sustained once civil conflict started in the early 1990s, and the number of women having undergone FGM is 98%.

The itinerant and highly mobile nature of the Somali populations, combined with strongly held beliefs and values, means education has been slow to reach people and affect what they do.

FGM is mainly performed by lay practitioners or family members. However, some qualified midwives and doctors still carry it out, although awareness of the harm caused is increasing. Momoh describes the use of ‘herbs, salt water, sugar, and camel dung’ to stop bleeding, and also leg binding for several days. She also uncovered some of the reasons why the practice continues: reasons that influence Somali populations now living.

For example, FGM is perceived to:
- protect daughters from being raped
- ensure young women remain pure for marriage
- increase their eligibility for marriage
- increase the dowry
- maintain the family dignity.

Although more educated people and many urban dwellers are changing their ideas, Momoh discovered that lay practitioners believe that they provide a wanted service and also risked losing their livelihood if the practice was condemned.

The WHO, which heads up the global initiative against FGM, has recently published a strategy to counter the medicalisation of FGM entitled *Global Strategy to Stop Health Care Providers from Performing Female Genital Mutilation* (WHO, 2014). The strategy was developed in collaboration with other key UN agencies and international organisations following the adoption of a resolution to eliminate FGM by the UN General Assembly, which was passed in December 2012. This resolution resulted in greater engagement by global organisations such as WHO, UNICEF and the UNFPA, as well as the European Parliament and other national governments, in working to end this violation of the human rights of girls and women.

In 2009, END FGM, a European campaign led by Amnesty International Ireland, began working in partnership with a number of organisations in the European Union (EU) to highlight increasing concerns about the prevalence of FGM across the EU. The campaign focused on human rights issues and the need to lobby for a comprehensive and coherent approach towards ending FGM (END FGM, 2009). It has been suggested that 500,000 women living in the EU have undergone FGM and 180,000 girls are at risk of undergoing FGM every year, although it is unclear how this estimate was derived (European Parliament Resolution, 2008).

A recent study suggests that:

“... an estimated 103,000 women aged 15–49 with FGM, born in countries in which it is practised, were living in England and Wales in 2011, compared with the estimated 66,000 in 2001. In addition there were an estimated 24,000 women aged 50 and over with FGM born in FGM practising countries and nearly 10,000 girls aged 0–14 born in FGM practising countries who have undergone or are likely to undergo FGM. Combining the figures for the three age groups, an estimated 137,000 women and girls with FGM, born in countries where FGM is practised, were permanently resident in England and Wales in 2011.”

(Macfarlane and Dorkenoo, 2014)
The education of male partners and community leaders may also reduce the number of children, and young and older women who suffer in the future. However, cultural practices such as FGM have been ingrained for many generations and require extensive education to address the issues thoroughly and effectively.

The establishment of an FGM Hotline (0800 028 3550 or fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk) in 2013 which is managed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), has proved a useful source of support for women and professionals.

In 2013, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association, in association with the human rights organisation Equality Now, created an intercollegiate FGM group (RCM et al., 2013) to develop recommendations towards tackling FGM across the UK, many of which are now being implemented.

The intercollegiate group’s recommendations clearly assert the view that FGM is child abuse and a violation of human rights and provides an outline of areas for service improvement (see Figure 3). The report calls on health care professionals, together with the police and education and social work professionals, to consider their responsibilities on the safeguarding of the girls and women who may be affected by, or at risk of being mutilated.

There are numerous examples of programmes across the UK, some initiated by women and others by professionals working across agencies who have invested in campaigns to raise consciousness and understanding of the consequences of FGM. These include community groups and the police, as well as education and health and social care practitioners. An example of one such initiative can be found in Bristol (see Appendix 2 for a synopsis of this work).

The recent increase in activity focused on the elimination of FGM because of the devastating consequences to women has been made possible, in part, by the bravery of some girls and women who have been prepared to share their experiences and risk their own wellbeing in order to campaign against this practice.

A study of one such community-based project by Brown and Hemmings (2013), demonstrates how programmes which focus on community-orientated strategies can achieve significant outcomes by engaging with community members and leaders to change attitudes and deliver education on the risks associated with FGM. The evidence shows that understanding the community and providing access to specialist FGM services are vital steps for changing the existing culture.

Hussein’s study (Hussein, 2010) also provides useful insights into women’s experiences, perceptions and attitudes to FGM, and highlights key actions that can help eliminate FGM:

• engagement with the community and integration
• providing a safe space for dialogue and discussion
• raising awareness of FGM
• providing specialist health services which should incorporate female practitioners, interpreters, physical and psychological support, and sensitivity by staff in understanding FGM
• awareness of the law and balanced supportive safeguarding frameworks.

Tackling FGM in the UK

The recent increase in activity focused on the elimination of FGM because of the devastating consequences to women has been made possible, in part, by the bravery of some girls and women who have been prepared to share their experiences and risk their own wellbeing in order to campaign against this practice.

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There are a number of immediate challenges when it comes to tackling FGM; these are related to the education of the public and professional workers, and the need for more accurate data on actual prevalence. High quality information-sharing pathways across agencies and comprehensive evidence gathering to support prosecutions, where a child has been put at risk or mutilated (RCM et al., 2013) is also essential.

Since the publication of these recommendations a wide range of initiatives have been enhanced or established with the intention of tackling FGM across the UK and the globe.

The most notable changes from a health care practice perspective have been the collection of anonymised data via the Enhanced Data Set and the mandatory duty to report all cases of FGM in those under 18 years of age.

**Effective use of data**

While Macfarlane and Dorkenoo (2014) provide useful estimates on the prevalence of FGM in the UK, it is critically important to have accurate data on the actual numbers of women affected, by which types of FGM. In 2014, as part of its FGM Prevention Programme, the Department of Health (ISB, 2014) set in place a requirement for better data collection across the health service and the first anonymised data report was published by the HSCIC in October 2014.

**Enhanced Data Set** is the term used for the collection of data on all cases of FGM, which is published anonymously by HSCIC. It is currently collected from acute trusts, mental health services and GP practices. The main purpose is to collect more accurate data on the numbers of women affected by FGM, and their location, in order to be able to ensure appropriate services are commissioned. This has not been implemented without concerns about confidentiality, and whether it might put women off seeking the health-related services they need. At present there is no evidence to support this concern, however the emerging picture will continue to be scrutinised locally and nationally. There have also been discussions about how the enhanced dataset takes into account the individual wishes of women, and associated confidentiality questions. For further information see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/fgm-enhanced-dataset-guidance-on-nhs-staff-responsibilities

Initial figures show that between April and September 2014, 1,279 female patients previously identified as having been subjected to FGM were accessing health care. This data represents the first official figures published on FGM cases seen in hospitals in England, and should be viewed critically as it will not provide a complete picture for some years to come. This was followed by further reports, available at www.hscic.gov.uk/fgm, which begins to provide a country-wide profile of women seeking health care who have been subjected to FGM.

This data should support better planning and commissioning of services; especially in relation to identifying where services are most needed.

The HSCIC acknowledged it has no figures indicating the population potentially at risk of FGM, or the number with a history of FGM not currently being treated for FGM-related or non-FGM related conditions (HSCIC, 2014). The intention is that these anonymous reports/statistics will help to build a useful data set of the number affected by FGM across England.

**A new mandatory duty to report FGM** cases to the police came into effect from 31 October 2015. The new duty applies where a nurse or midwife (and extends beyond health care), in the course of their work, is either informed directly by the girl that FGM has been carried out on her, or observes physical signs which appear to show that she has been abused by FGM having been carried out and has no reason to believe that the act was necessary for the girl’s physical or mental health or for purposes connected with labour or birth.

The new duty applies only to girls under 18 at the time of disclosure or visual identification of FGM and applies only in England and Wales.

The mandatory duty to report FGM requires all cases of FGM in under 18-year-olds to be reported directly to the police, as well as implementing a safeguarding
pathway for the girl, and ensuring she receives the required care. The Department of Health has provided details of how the process should be implemented locally, however it is critically important that all nursing and midwifery staff familiarise themselves with local procedures, and contacts for safeguarding pathways. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the process outlined by the Department of Health and NHS England, endorsed by a number of Royal Colleges.

In complying with the NMC code, nurses and midwives should continue to have regard to their wider safeguarding responsibilities, whether in relation to FGM or any other forms of abuse.

Nurses and midwives should familiarise themselves with the local safeguarding processes which should now include the pathway for best supporting a girl under 18 years of age found to have been abused in this way. A range of additional resources to support health professionals comply with the new duty are available at: www.gov.uk. These resources include a DH risk assessment tool, and specific safeguarding guidance for professionals. Failure to comply with this duty to report may result in an investigation of the nurse or midwife’s fitness to practise by the NMC.

FGM is a safeguarding issue and the main difference between discovering or suspecting FGM has been performed on a girl and any other form of abuse is that the practitioner has to report it directly to the police. This is being managed locally through the non emergency 101 service (www.police.uk/contact/101/), and any nurse or midwife who is likely to provide care for girls, should be familiar with these local systems. The DH has provided guidance on what information should be provided and this is available at: www.gov.uk

At the same time they should implement their local safeguarding processes as they would for any form of suspected or confirmed abuse, as well as providing care for the initial health query.

At present there is no requirement to refer women (ie, over 18 years of age) with FGM to social services or the police unless they have specific safeguarding concerns, however there should be opportunities to refer individuals to specialist health services where complications are identified. Health professionals need to be aware of which services are available locally to support women who have physical, psychological or psychosexual complications from having had FGM performed on them.

Government initiatives include the development of multi-agency guidelines to support best practice (HM Government, 2011 (being updated in 2016)) and in February 2014 the UK government published its declaration to end FGM on the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (6 February 2014). A national FGM prevention programme, initiated by the Department of Health in England, is well underway and Appendix 4 provides a diagrammatic overview of the government departments currently engaged in the campaign to end FGM across England.

The UK government has amended the existing Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 so that prosecutions can be made to prevent British citizens and residents living in this country from taking children overseas for the procedure. There are a series of amendments included in the Serious Crime Act 2015, which strengthen the legal framework regarding FGM. It means that the 2003 Act can capture offences of FGM committed abroad against UK residents, irrespective of immigration status. The new law also allows for civil protection orders to be made where a girl or woman is identified at risk of FGM.

Scotland
In Scotland, the FGM programme is managed under the Violence Against Women Outcomes Framework (further information, including fact sheets in a range of languages, can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk). A critical range of stakeholders are engaged in developing services, including data collection, learning about FGM and community engagement, as well as an initiative to engage head teachers (Scottish Government, 2014), where educational establishments are seen as key players in protecting girls who may be at risk. Further information on FGM in Scotland is also available from...
the Dignity Alert Research Forum (DARF) website (www.darf.org.uk).

In January 2016, Scotland is consulting on new guidelines, the temporary title is Responding To Female Genital Mutilation In Scotland: Multi-agency Guidance. Further information will be available later in 2016.

Wales
The Welsh government has an ongoing programme of work (WAG, 2013) developing a national training framework for key professionals across the public sector; including writing to all schools on the subject (WAG, 2014b). For health care professionals the work is led by the Chief Nursing Officer’s office and supported by the Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales.

Northern Ireland
In Northern Ireland, the FGM programme of work is managed within safeguarding and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland (DHSSPSNI) has published guidelines (DHSSPSNI, 2014). These guidelines provide a resource for contacts and specific guidance for Northern Ireland. There is growing expertise and understanding of the need to enhance services for women with FGM and key organisations are working to enhance service provision and awareness raising.

Other initiatives include:

• The Girl Summit held on 22 July 2014 in London was a significant event, co-hosted by the UK Government and UNICEF, “built partnerships and galvanised the global movements to end Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and Child, Early and Forced Marriage” further information is available at: www.girlsummit2014.org/Commitment/Show

• In December 2015 a new website was launched, which focuses on the needs of teenagers to help educate young people about FGM – Everybody’s business: http://fgm-every-bodys-biz.co.uk/

International work
In 2014 the UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID) appointed a consortium of leading anti-FGM campaigners to deliver a global campaign to end FGM within a generation. Known as the End FGM/C Social Change Campaign, the programme aspires to use a social change model that has a real impact on FGM practising communities – and the consortium also works across Africa to bring about a transformation in attitudes towards FGM and end the harmful practice.

The Girl Generation is now a global campaign that supports the Africa-led movement to end FGM. Further information is available at: www.thegirlgeneration.org
Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure that involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or causes other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO, 2014).

FGM may be conducted from shortly after birth to age 15 or young motherhood. The procedure may be performed in a clean, clinical setting but is often undertaken in poor light, without anaesthesia and using blades, knives, broken glass or non-surgical instruments that are often shared.

Girls have to be forcibly restrained and, following more extensive forms of FGM, their legs may be tied together for days to aid healing. Accidental damage, infection and haemorrhage are common, and long-term physical and mental health problems may follow if the child survives – death is not uncommon.

FGM offers no therapeutic benefit to women and girls, and is illegal in many countries including the UK. Some countries have legalised FGM on the assumption that it is safer if conducted within medical care, however this is contrary to WHO recommendations (WHO, 2008).

**Types of FGM**

FGM is practised in different ways by different communities, and some forms are more extensive than others and cause greater health risks for girls and women. The WHO has categorised FGM into four types (see Figure 4).
Figure 4 – WHO classifications: types 1-4

The WHO has developed four major FGM categories.

1. **Clitoridectomy**: the partial or total removal of the clitoris – a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals – or the removal of the prepuce only – the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris, also known as the clitoral hood, rarely, if ever performed alone. – See Diagram 2.

2. **Excision**: the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora – the labia are the ‘lips’ that surround the vagina) – see Diagram 3.

3. **Infibulation**: the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris – see Diagrams 4 and 5.

4. Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes; for example pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area – see Diagram 6.

Diagram 1 – Normal external female genitalia

- Labium majus
- Vagina
- Anus
- External urethral orifice
- Labium minus
- Posterior fourchette
- Perineum
- Clitoris
Diagram 2 – Type 1 FGM
When the clitoris or the clitoral hood is cut off

Diagram 3 – Type 2 FGM
When the clitoris and inner lips are cut off

Diagram 4 and 5 – Type 3 FGM
When the clitoris, inner lips and outer lips are cut and sewn together

Diagram 6 – An example of type 4 FGM stretched labia
All other harmful practices including stretching, pricking, piercing, cutting, scraping and burning

Stretched labia
Health risks and complications

The complications that may occur following FGM will depend on the type and extent of the procedure carried out and should not be underestimated. These are generally classified as:

- immediate (Figure 5)
- intermediate (Figure 6)
- long-term complications (Figure 7).

**Figure 5 – Immediate complications**

Immediate complications include:

- haemorrhage, pain, shock
- wound infection, septicaemia, tetanus
- urine retention
- injury to other tissues, for example, vaginal fistulae
- ulceration of the genital region
- bacterial or viral infections such as Hepatitis and HIV due to instruments being re-used without sterilisation
- death.

**Figure 6 – Intermediate complications**

Intermediate complications include:

- delayed healing
- abscesses
- scarring/keloid formation, dysmenorrhoea and haematocolpus – obstruction to menstrual flow
- pelvic infections
- obstruction to urinary flow
- urinary tract infection.

**Figure 7 – Long-term complications**

Long-term complications include:

- psychosocial trauma and flashbacks, post-traumatic stress disorder
- lack of trust in carers
- vaginal closure due to scarring
- epidermal cyst formation
- neurofibromata – benign tumours of nerve tissue that may arise from cut nerve endings and cause pain
- pain and chronic infection from obstruction to menstrual flow
- recurrent urinary tract infection and renal damage
- painful intercourse (dyspareunia), lack of pleasurable sensations and orgasm, marital conflict
- infertility from pelvic inflammatory disease and obstructed genital tract
- risk of HIV through traumatic intercourse
- childbirth trauma – perineal tears and vaginal fistulae
- postnatal wound infection
- prolonged or obstructed labour from tough scarred perineum, uterine inertia or rupture, and death of infant and mother
- vaginal fistulae as consequence of obstructed labour.

Serious illness and death can occur even when FGM is carried out by health professionals, who may be acting illegally and in unclean surroundings without sterilisation facilities for instruments. Even where the practitioner is skilled and cleanliness ensured, the long-term effects can ruin women’s lives and relationships.

Type 3 FGM inevitably causes more health problems and deaths. Momoh et al. (2003) found 86% of women suffered problems following type 3 FGM. Most women with type 3 FGM tend to have problems with penetration following marriage; for some couples it can take several months to achieve this. Husbands who find
The psychosocial trauma and post-traumatic stress caused by FGM cannot be underestimated and it may include fear of sexual intercourse, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and memory loss; its impact is felt on the lives of women and their families. It is an area of practice that is increasingly becoming better understood and researched; a pilot study (Liao LM et al., 2013) demonstrated the critical need for further research in this area, in particular the requirement for psychological and psychosexual research to enhance service provision. It is also becoming more widely acknowledged that FGM has a detrimental impact on a woman’s sexual pleasure, as well as her physical/sexual wellbeing.

The emergence of specialist clinics, such as those for children and those catering for the psycho-sexual needs of women affected by FGM, is a further demonstration of the advances being made in providing better services for women and girls. The fear of sexual intercourse, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including anxiety and depression should be considered when caring for women who have been subjected to abuse, consequently, service provision should encompass a wide range of services required by women who have been traumatised by FGM – in particular, mental health, psycho-sexual services and counselling. These should be specialised services, and need to be sourced locally to best support women who have been affected.
Human rights, legal and professional responsibility

A human rights issue

FGM is a violation of respect for, and the dignity of, girls and women subjected to this cruel practice; it is a clear form of violence against women and girls. The practice breaches fundamental human rights guaranteed by a multiplicity of international agreements, the most significant of which in terms of UK law is the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Drawn up by the Council of Europe in 1950, the Convention has been incorporated into domestic UK law through the Human Rights Act (2000). The Act affords citizens a variety of legal remedies in circumstances where their rights have been interfered with.

Relevant rights in the context of FGM include:
• Article 3 – protection against inhuman or degrading treatment
• Article 8 – the right to respect for privacy and family life.

The requirements of the European Convention reflect, very closely, existing good professional practice. A failure of the state to fulfil its positive obligation to protect child and adult female rights in these circumstances, by prosecution or otherwise, could itself be open to challenge under human rights legislation.

Various forms of mutilation, whether carried out for religious or social reasons, and conducted without the child’s consent and for non-therapeutic purposes, infringe the child’s right to bodily integrity.

Although parents have rights to bring up their children according to their own beliefs, the rights of the child to protection come first and courts will inevitably weigh the balance more heavily in favour of child protection. There is also a large body of international human rights law specifically to protect and promote the rights of children; for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Protocol to the African Charter (African Union, 2003).

Legal aspects

FGM is illegal in a number of countries, even those where it is customarily practised. Many countries where FGM is not normally carried out, such as the UK, also have legal provision to cover those who arrive from elsewhere, especially if they are migrants from FGM practising communities. This includes protection for those temporarily removed from the UK with the intention of inflicting harm on them.

The UK legal framework

The UK Acts of Parliament are relevant in respect to FGM:
• Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act (1985)
• Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003)
• Serious Crime Act 2015.

The 2003 Act applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland; in Scotland, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005 applies. Doctors, nurses and midwives participating in FGM also face removal from their respective professional registers and would be prosecuted for taking part.
The 1985 Act states that it is an offence for any person to:

• ‘... excise, infibulate or otherwise mutilate the whole or any part of the labia majora or clitoris of another person’
• ‘... aid, abet, counsel or procure the performance by another person of any of those acts on that other person’s own body’; this also means that following childbirth or de-infibulation, the anterior middle incision can only be over-sewn and not closed back to its original state.

However, because of concerns relating to girls being taken out of the country for FGM and the lack of prosecutions, it became necessary to amend the law and repeal the 1985 Act. The Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003) came into force in March 2004. It re-enacted the above offences and created additional new offences, sending a strong message to communities practising FGM and practitioners involved in aiding, abetting, and/or counselling to procure, and performing FGM, that the practice is no longer acceptable in the UK even if performed in another country.

The main changes made were:

• it was now against the law for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to carry out FGM abroad, or to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad, on a UK national or permanent UK resident, even in countries where the practice is now legal (Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2003). This means that the law protects any girl, who is a UK national or permanent resident, from FGM anywhere in the world
• the penalty was increased from five to 14 years’ imprisonment
• the term ‘mutilation’ is used instead of circumcision
• the term ‘girl’ includes ‘woman’
• aiding, abetting and counselling applies to those who assist or persuade a girl to perform FGM on herself even though it is not itself an offence for that child to carry it out on herself (although not an offence, consideration should be given to whether such self-harm is a safeguarding issue, especially where the action may be the result of adult pressure)
• it is now considered illegal to re-infibulate a woman following the birth of her baby, because this is seen as a form of FGM, within the WHO definition of FGM.

Despite this robust legislation, the intercollegiate report (RCM et al., 2013) considered the lack of prosecutions to date; there is evidence that the link between prosecutions and prevention is becoming increasingly recognised. There are renewed efforts among the police and others, including health professionals, to directly address the barriers to prosecution.

Following extensive evidence gathering, in July 2014 the Home Affairs Committee published its report on FGM (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2014) which called for a national action plan and highlighted a number of issues relating to:

• impediments to achieving prosecutions for offences against the law on FGM
• the need to revise the multi-agency guidelines on FGM to include the mandatory questioning on FGM for antenatal booking interviews and at GP registration, and a requirement for the personal child health record (also known as the PCHR or ‘red book’) to refer explicitly to FGM (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2014)
• requiring all schools to provide training on FGM
• changes to the law on FGM, including the creation of FGM protection orders (similar to those for forced marriage).
• that the failure to report child abuse should become a criminal offence if other measures to increase the level of reporting are not effective in the next 12 months.
• better services for women and girls living with FGM.

This was contemporaneously published with a Ministry of Justice consultation on whether it was necessary to
have a specific civil protection order, akin to the forced marriage protection order, that might provide an additional tool to prevent female genital mutilation and which could complement the existing criminal law (MoJ, 2014); this could also provide some anonymity for those giving evidence. In October 2014, the Ministry of Justice announced it would be implementing protection orders which came into being via the Serious Crime Act in 2015.

The Serious Crime Act (2015) made provision to extend the jurisdiction of the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003). The changes mean the 2003 Act will capture FGM offences committed abroad by or against those habitually resident in the UK, irrespective of whether they are subject to immigration restrictions. Provided the offence is committed at a time when the accused person and/or the victim is resident in this country, it should not matter whether or not they intend to live here indefinitely or whether they also live elsewhere. See also the mandatory duty to report (on page 12).

Safeguarding law provides the framework through which a girl or woman’s needs are assessed and her best interests considered. The welfare of the child is paramount, according to the Children Act (1989) which allows legal action to be taken. However, legal measures may not be appropriate if protection can be achieved without these; judgemental attitudes are potentially harmful and bringing about change is more effective if people’s long-held attitudes are addressed.

It is important to promote understanding and to protect girls and women from the practice through a continuing programme of education and awareness-raising. This needs to include explaining why FGM is considered to be a violation of human rights, and the connection between the procedures and the long-term effects on the body and the emotions.

All regions and countries in the UK have in place procedures for safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, and all practitioners must ensure they are confident in using them in their practice.

The current child protection policies in UK countries are as follows:

- **Northern Ireland** – *Co-operating to Safeguard Children* (2003)

Safeguarding now and for future generations

All health care professionals have a duty of care to girls and women at risk of having FGM performed, or who have been cut in the past. Their responsibilities include ensuring their practice is performed within the requirements of their regulators (for example, the NMC for nurses and midwives) and the overall legal framework of the country they practice in.

While the overarching legal issue related to FGM is its illegality, practitioners must also ensure they provide care and support that is consistent with safeguarding law and procedures. Professionals should be familiar with what to do if they are worried that a child is being abused, including the local child protection policies.

The NMC website (www.nmc-uk.org) contains safeguarding guidance and information on how to raise and escalate concerns and apply safeguarding principles in nursing and midwifery practice. Similarly, the UK government’s Children’s Services provides online information and resources on safeguarding (www.gov.uk) and the RCN has produced guidelines for nurses around safeguarding children and young people (RCN, 2014).

Mather’s narrative in Appendix 2 demonstrates the importance of collaborating with teachers and social service colleagues, as well as working with affected community groups. The police may also need to be involved, especially in an emergency. Where relevant,
Safeguarding girls at risk of harm through FGM poses specific challenges because the families may give no other cause for concern (such as parenting responsibilities or relationships with their children). Family members may believe FGM is the right thing to do and consider it is in the child’s best interest, and adults may find it difficult to understand why the authorities should intervene in what they see as a cultural practice specific to their way of life. The family situation may be compounded by those who wish girls to be ritually cut when others disagree. Similarly there may be an inter-generational element, or a husband and wife may have differing views about their daughters.

The desire to carry out FGM is also not confined to individuals within particular levels of education or social class. The pressure to undertake this procedure may be embedded in family structures. At all times it is important to ‘think the unthinkable’, and act with ‘respectful uncertainty’ (DH, 2003).

Four specific issues are important in this context:
1. FGM is an illegal act; regardless of their age, a girl or woman has the right to protection from activities or events that may cause her harm. These rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) are enshrined in UK human rights legislation and is reflected in other laws, including the Children Act 2004 (England and Wales), Protection of Children Act (Scotland) 2003 and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. These rights and protections are in addition to other legislation that criminalises the practice of FGM.
2. The need to safeguard children and young people involved in FGM.
3. The risk to girls where a related adult has undergone FGM.
4. Situations where a child may be removed from the country for the purposes of performing FGM.

Whenever there is concern that a girl is at risk of harm through FGM, steps must be taken to safeguard them. This has to take account of the mandatory duty to report all cases to the police, as well as implementing local safeguarding procedures. If she has already had the procedure performed and there are other female siblings in the family, a child in need referral should be made following the steps outlined in What to do if you’re Worried a Child is Being Abused (HM Government, 2015).

The referring practitioner should follow guidelines about working in partnership with the family by being honest where this is possible and handling any disclosure sensitively. But the practitioner must also be clear about the reasons why they are undertaking safeguarding actions. This partnership would be unacceptable where the girl may come to harm as a result of any evidence being given to parents, as it could cause the family to vanish with their daughter.

There may be a need to approach social services first with suspicions. As well as health professionals having a role in providing information, it is the responsibility of social services to provide the family or parents with information about UK law and policy around FGM, safeguarding and support mechanisms. Social services should also alert families to their right to seek independent legal advice should they wish to appeal against any specific interventions.

The Department of Health has a new framework – developed in conjunction with professional bodies, Royal Colleges and the Department for Education –
published to guide professionals dealing with girls at risk of FGM from birth onwards, so that staff will know how to respond to FGM safeguarding concerns. Female Genital Mutilation Risk and Safeguarding Guidance for Professionals (DH, 2015) includes a risk assessment process and can be found at www.gov.uk. The information is being regularly updated.

All professionals coming into contact with children and young people have a responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare and should know what to do if they have concerns about safeguarding issues, including child protection. The publication Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and Competences for Health Care Staff (RCPCH, 2014) provides extensive details on competences, skills and attitudes which should be embedded in all levels of practice and contact around safeguarding.

The DH has also produced a range of resources, including a DH Risk Assessment tool, and specific safeguarding guidance for professionals available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418564/2903800_DH_FGM_Accessible_v0.1.pdf

Across the UK, specialist safeguarding/child protection professionals provide expertise and have specific roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, named and designated professionals perform this function while in Scotland nurse consultants, child protection advisers and lead clinicians fulfil specialist roles (RCN, 2014).
Service provision and multi-agency working

Communication

Communication with women, even if interpreters are not required, needs to be clear, using straightforward language and explanations. Pictures or diagrams may help. It is important to listen without interruption, avoid rushing or providing too much information at once, and check that women have understood. Some of these women may not have seen female genitalia which has not been mutilated therefore it may be useful to show diagrams of both for comparison.

Initiating the conversation can be challenging for many health care practitioners and so framing it in the context of “have you ever been cut or had any form of surgery or piercings?” may be a useful opening question to encourage further discussion.

The DH has a film about having conversations around FGM to help with speaking to women about FGM which is available at: www.nhs.uk/video/pages/speaking-with-patients-about-fgm.aspx

A Statement Opposing Female Genital Mutilation, published in June 2015, can be given to girls and families to help them when explaining the illegality and complications of FGM to wider family and community members, both when they are abroad and in the UK, and is available at HM Government – Health Passport (Statement opposing female genital mutilation).

Multi-agency working

While raising awareness and creating cognisance of FGM are critical in the fight to eradicate the procedure, there also needs to be adequate and well considered services to support best practice; whether that is safeguarding, data collection, physical and psychological care, and training and education. A key characteristic of high quality safeguarding is multi-agency working and managing FGM similarly depends on this; work needs to reflect local need, and extend across health and social care, as well as education and the police forces.

This publication is focused on the needs of nurses and midwives, but providing the best care for women and girls affected by FGM must include working alongside other agencies involved in safeguarding. Safeguarding is everybody’s business and should not be left to those who may lead services in this crucial area of work.

FGM is an issue where multi-agency teamwork and communication is vital. All services should be open, offer flexible access and there should be cohesive collaboration between agencies. Women may be unwilling to come forward for help, or may be unaware of what is available, or not know how to ask; they may find it difficult to raise the topic with health care staff because they may believe practitioners have limited awareness of FGM or may respond in a negative manner. Nurses and midwives should be alert to this and take opportunities to enquire sensitively and offer support and referral to specialist clinics. Generally, women are likely to prefer female carers to male.

It is important to note that health care professionals may not need to provide all services. Support groups and organisations have a very important role to play and have been prime movers in bringing about change.

Service provision

A seamless service for women and adequate protection for girls at risk depends on integrated working between services. Everyone who may come into contact with
FGM practising communities needs to understand their responsibilities, and have appropriate training and referral mechanisms; they will need to know from whom they should seek help and advice and the steps to take to provide appropriate support. This means clear, well understood and rehearsed guidelines must be in place. Similarly, other care practitioners must be aware of FGM issues and be able to recognise when girls or young women may be at risk or have been harmed.

Health care managers and commissioners should focus on access to and provision of:

- clear guidance to employees
- education and training for all, preferably across agencies, as well as specific to health care
- clear lines of communication with others such as education, social and law enforcement services.

The DH document Commissioning Services to Support Women and Girls with FGM (Department of Health, 2015) sets out what a successful and safe service to support women and girls with FGM might look like.

CMO’s report (Davies, 2015) considers how best to commission multidisciplinary services for women and girls with FGM in high prevalence areas, and with clear pathways for referral from low prevalence areas.

Many of the requirements for women’s primary, sexual and reproductive health services, such as routine urinalysis, cervical screening, gynaecological and fertility services, may not be well-prepared to meet the needs of women and girls who have been subjected to FGM, and may need further support and changes to established service delivery.

Women and children who have been mutilated may need access to services such as:

- counselling, psycho-sexual and psychiatric support through statutory or voluntary services because of psychological trauma, relationship or psycho-sexual difficulties
- infertility
- uro-gynaecological services, including surgical reversal of infibulation
- access to an interpreter service with workers who appreciate the problems facing children and women who have been cut, and also those of refugees and asylum seekers: it is essential that women are not reliant on family members for interpretation when dealing with health care professionals; children should never be used for interpreting purposes
- specialised maternity advice services.

It is also important for women and girls to have access to specialist services. A growing number of specialist clinics are becoming available across the UK and all nurses and midwives, particularly those working with women and children, families and communities, should have the appropriate specialist skills to work effectively with this client group.

**Health visitors, school and community children’s nurses**

Health visitors, school and community children’s nurses (CCNs) have a responsibility to ensure families know that the practice of FGM is illegal and are in an ideal position to act if they consider a girl or young woman is at risk. FGM may be carried out secretly in the UK, but it is more likely that a girl or young woman will be sent ‘home’ to her family’s country of origin for FGM to be performed. This is inevitably, although not exclusively, likely to occur during a school holiday, although approaches will vary from one community or ethnic population to another.

It is therefore essential that those coming into contact with girls and young women have detailed knowledge of local communities and social structures, whilst engaging with them to really understand what is important to them, as well as being aware of the safeguarding responsibility.

Health visitors work closely with families in their homes and have a key role to play in health promotion and education from an early age in a girl’s life. This may include helping and supporting families to explore ways of breaking the cycle of ritual abuse. Health visitors, school nurses and CCNs are also well placed to
collaborate and engage in support and referral as part of a multi-professional team. School nurses and CCNs, like teachers, may be in a position of trust and receive disclosures from girls and young women (or their friends) that lead them to suspect that individuals are at risk. Pressure may come from people other than the adult family members; it may be other children in the family who are pressurising one specific girl or young woman to undergo FGM.

Behavioural changes may indicate a risk of harm, or that harm has already occurred. A simple change such as prolonged visits to the toilet may indicate that a child is experiencing difficulties urinating following type 3 FGM.

This includes being aware of the possible true purpose of a girl’s visit to the family’s country of origin. Older girls and siblings may also be very aware of the risk or purpose of a planned visit abroad but be unable to protect themselves unaided. They may have confided in the practitioner, who must know how to operate within the safeguarding and legislative procedures.

While it is not the responsibility of individual practitioners to undertake investigations, they should be alert to considering FGM among general assessments and know who to refer concerns to. The concept of making every contact count (RCN, 2014) has been expanded in recent years, and FGM is one of the issues that should be considered. Where suspicion has been established a risk assessment needs to take place, be actioned and then documented. Figure 8 provides questions which may help with the risk assessment process, although each local area should have such systems in place that are understood by all frontline personnel who are likely to come in contact with women or girls affected by FGM.

Figure 8 – Questions to consider when undertaking a risk assessment

- Do I need to consider FGM here?
- Where does the woman/girl come from originally?
- Has she ever been cut or had any form of surgery or piercings?
- Is the girl/woman a victim of FGM?
- Is the girl at risk of FGM?
- Do she have daughter(s) under 18 years of age?
- In discussing attitudes to FGM, do you conclude that it is more likely or less likely that she will subject her daughter(s) to FGM?
- Are there any plans to travel to a country where FGM is prevalent with her daughter(s)?
- Do she have sisters/other female relatives who have undergone FGM?

The Department of Health has produced a risk assessment process which can be found in its Female Genital Mutilation Risk and Safeguarding Guidance for Professionals (DH, 2015) at www.gov.uk

Community, practice and travel nurses

Community and practice nurses, who have access to women in the community or home setting may note information leading them to think that girls may be at risk, such as the behavioural changes identified above. It is equally important for nurses working in travel, clinics or who come into contact with women who are travelling abroad to be vigilant, for example around passport authorisation.

Travel nurses need to understand that they may be in a position to identify girls who are at imminent risk of FGM, however this can be a challenging and complex area for travel health professionals because they may not have easy access to patient notes or the wider services that are available in acute trusts or GP surgeries. Travel health also encompasses many
disciplines including nurses, doctors and pharmacists and is delivered in multiple settings in both NHS and the independent sector. This can pose a different set of issues and separate RCN guidance and standards are in development in 2016 to reflect the complexity of this area.

**Acute sector nurses**

Nurses working across the full spectrum of acute services such as neonatal and child health, sexual health, accident and emergency, gynaecology, or other related areas should be aware of FGM. It is important to be able to respond appropriately in the best interests of any girl or young woman who may be at risk of abuse, or who may have already been mutilated.

In recognition of some of the specific issues faced in sexual health care the RCN is currently producing guidance to reflect the complexity of this area of practice (2016).

**Midwives**

Midwives are most likely to encounter women who have been mutilated, and it is important to ask the question during pregnancy to ensure a safe birth and postnatal care for both mother and baby. Maternity services, especially where there are known FGM practising communities, will have specialist midwives who take the lead on supporting these women and their colleagues in better understanding the issues surrounding FGM.

Midwives may also be concerned where baby girls are born to women who have had FGM performed, and this will naturally require a sensitive approach. There are differing views at present on whether this puts the girl at risk, but child protection must remain paramount. Documentation of conversations and concerns are vital to ensure better continuity of care going forward. However, if there are any concerns then further action is essential and can be carried out via safeguarding leads. Equally, midwives may also become concerned about a girl being at risk while attending a family for the birth of a subsequent child.

**Figure 9 – Identifying girls at risk**

This is difficult because:

- it happens only once
- parents may believe FGM is a good thing to do for their daughters
- the genitalia of girls are rarely examined
- it is not culturally acceptable for girls to talk openly about FGM.

There is a risk if:

- the girl’s mother or her older sisters have been cut
- the woman or girl has limited contact with people outside of her family
- the paternal grandmother is very influential within the family
- the woman has poor access to information about FGM
- no one talks to the mother about FGM
- health, social service and education staff fail to respond appropriately
- communities are given the impression that FGM is not taken seriously by the statutory sector
- the woman has strong links with country of origin, family remaining in country of origin/frequent travel to country of origin.

Adapted from the Foundation for Women’s Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) training pack, 2006

**Confidentiality**

To safeguard children and young people it may be necessary to give information to people working in other parts of the health service or outside of it. For some practitioners this can pose dilemmas, but both the law and policy allow for disclosure where it is in the public interest or where a criminal act has been perpetrated or a child is at risk. Parents are responsible for their children and they may fear having this responsibility (or even the child) taken away from them. There may also be a perception that passing on information can damage the relationship of trust built up with families and communities. Nonetheless, it is
crucial that the focus is kept on the best interests of the child as required by law.

The NMC (NMC, 2010) is clear about professional responsibility, in particular around confidentiality. It is normally expected that information is shared with others only with the consent of the patient or client, but makes provision for when this is not possible ‘if the patient or client withholds consent, or if consent cannot be obtained for whatever reason’. Disclosures may be made only where these:

- can be justified in the public interest (usually where disclosure is essential to protect the patient or client or someone else from the risk of significant harm)
- are required by law or an order of court.

**Referral to appropriate agencies**

Caring for girls and women affected by FGM is not the primary responsibility of one professional group; it requires multi-agency management and nurses and midwives need to be aware of local procedures for referral where safeguarding is a concern. It is also important to understand local structures and services which may benefit a woman or girl who has physical, psychological or psycho-sexual complications as a result of being mutilated.

Knowledge of local support groups or campaigns can be invaluable additions to the toolkit required to support best practice.

**Education, raising awareness and conscious engagement to change**

Raising awareness and consciousness about the practical, socio-cultural, ethico-legal, sexual health and practice care implications involved in FGM is essential, if real change is to happen.

Education and training needs to be provided for all health and social care professionals who may work with affected women and girls and with their families. It is also important to consider the issues of ethnicity, custom, culture and religion in a sensitive manner. Professionals should explore ways of resolving problems about the continuation of this practice in ways that involve women (and their communities) with their full participation.

The RCN believes that FGM should be a part of health education in all pre-registration and post-registration programmes for nurses, midwives and health visitors. It is also important for all registrants to ensure they are adequately prepared to provide effective practice in respect of FGM, in line with the NMC code (NMC, 2015). It is equally essential to raise awareness and the seriousness of the issues among teachers, school nurses and social service staff, as well as qualified nurses and midwives. There are increasing opportunities locally and nationally for access to appropriate education, dependant on the expected level of engagement in the subject by health professionals. A recent news report noted that nursery staff in London are being trained to spot the signs of female genital mutilation amid concerns that girls are being cut at increasingly younger ages to avoid detection (*Evening Standard*, October 2014).

The Department of Health commissioned Health Education England to produce e-learning training sessions. These are provided on the national eLearning for Health platform, available free to all NHS trusts (available at www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/female-genital-mutilation) and includes an introductory module for all health care staff.

As FGM is a safeguarding issue, it should be integral to all safeguarding training and annual updates to ensure all health care personnel have contemporary knowledge and a good understanding of identifying and referring any cases they come in contact with.

The case study scenarios contained in figure 10 may help with the initiation of professional conversations relating to FGM and may enable individual nurses and midwives to consider how they might manage situations that may arise.
Figure 10 – Case study scenarios

1. A young girl who had already been subjected to FGM, Sahra was a 15-year-old asylum seeker who was very anxious and spoke very little English. She confided in a nurse that she was circumcised when she was five years old. She requested help and talked about the way she felt as well as the complications she was experiencing. If you found yourself in this situation:
   • how would you help Sahra?
   • what are the issues?
   • are there any particular legal issues?
   • what might you do?

2. A young girl is about to go on holiday to her country of origin. She has told her teacher that she is going to her country of origin to see her family during the summer holidays. She was told by her mother that on her return she would be a woman. The teacher has become concerned and suspects that the six-year-old would be circumcised:
   • as the school nurse, how might you become involved and what would you do?

3. A woman delivered her first baby, a girl, a week previously. When the midwife visited her the woman asked her for information about where she could get a circumciser to circumcise her daughter, because this is the culture in the area she came from:
   • what do you believe a midwife should do in this circumstance?
   • is this a child protection issue?
   • who should be involved?
Practice matters and procedures

Professional curiosity and assessing need

Nurses and midwives need to be aware of how to sensitively care for women and girls, as well as being able to safeguard those at risk. They also need to be aware that accepting and respectful attitudes are vitally important to girls and women who have been cut. Equally, health professionals need to be curious about their local community to understand their needs and to actively engage with women to fully understand the community perspective on challenging issues such as FGM. Continuity of care and a holistic attitude to care provision will all support best practice.

The CMO’s report (Davies, 2015) recommends that “all under-18s with suspected or confirmed FGM should be seen by or with a paediatrician with relevant expertise and experience, as well as knowledge of safeguarding”.

Women and girls who have suffered mutilation may be very reluctant to agree to a vaginal or rectal examination, and may refuse routine cervical smears and/or infection screening. It may be impossible to perform a vaginal examination at all, and can be very difficult or impossible to pass a urinary catheter. Nurses and midwives need to be compassionate and caring, exhibiting a sensitive manner, and be prepared sufficiently so that they do not exhibit signs of shock, confusion, horror or revulsion on seeing the genitalia.

Making Every Contact Count is a fairly recent programme, focused on improving the lives of all those who come in contact with health care professionals, and is an ideal opportunity to develop a relationship with women and their families and to gather information about issues such as FGM. It is intended to create opportunities within existing health consultations to make every contact with a health professional count towards increasing health and well being awareness. Further information on Making Every Contact, public health topics and nursing roles is available from the RCN website at www.rcn.org.uk

Despite the need for sensitivity, it is important to ask women whether they have been cut or circumcised. Some may seek help because they wish to have the FGM reversed before marrying, or may be experiencing problems conceiving because of difficulties with penetration and need to be referred to appropriate specialist clinics.

A deinfibulation service should be available, should be well-advertised via women’s groups, and be easily accessible to those who may need it. Often known as reversal, deinfibulation involves opening the scar tissue that covers the vaginal introitus and the urethral meatus surgically. Although best performed when not pregnant, women may need deinfibulation to be done as an emergency, for example, during a miscarriage. This is because products of conception, such as blood clots and fetal tissue, can be retained behind scar tissue and could lead to serious infection.

Knowledge about diversity

In our multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, self-awareness and knowledge of diversity are essential skills for all health care professionals, enabling them to provide high quality individualised care. Concerns frequently articulated when giving reasons for why it may be difficult to engage with girls and women who need safeguarding because of FGM is not wishing to appear to act in discriminatory ways or from racist motivations.

FGM is mostly found in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and while cultural sensitivity to the girl, woman and her family is always paramount, it should not override the safety or wellbeing of individuals. The inquiry report into the death of Victoria Climbié clearly notes the danger of making assumptions about cultural
background that conflict with ensuring children’s safety (House of Commons Health Committee, 2003). Lord Laming noted that children’s needs for protection are the same whatever their cultural background, saying:

“a child is a child regardless of colour – if we are not careful we’ll lose the whole emphasis on the child’s welfare.”

(House of Commons Health Committee, 2003)

Although the Laming inquiry relates to very different circumstances to FGM, comments made in the report are useful to review and the Counsel to the inquiry stated that:

“Fear of being accused of racism can stop people acting when otherwise they would. The evidence of one witness indicated her expressed need ‘to be sensitive to feelings of people of all races and backgrounds’. Lord Laming again noted that those involved in safeguarding ‘should never feel inhibited from acting in a child’s interests on the grounds that they are felt by others to have an insufficient grasp of the child’s particular circumstances’.”

(House of Commons Health Committee, 2003)

Lord Laming makes another statement that is helpful to practitioners involved in protecting girls at risk of FGM:

“The basic requirement that children are kept safe is universal and cuts across cultural boundaries. Every child living in this country is entitled to be given the protection of the law, regardless of his or her background. Cultural heritage is important to many people, but it cannot take precedence over standards of care embodied in law.”

(House of Commons Health Committee, 2003)

On the subject of being accused of being prejudiced, and with reference to Lord Laming, Yana Richens OBE writes:

“Practice nurses, and all nurses and midwives who come in contact with women and girls in the community should take the opportunity to discuss with families who are requesting a passport for their female child to take them overseas to countries known to practice FGM. This should be recorded in the notes of the parent/guardian that they were informed regarding the legal consequences of FGM; it should also be recorded in the child’s health records. Nurses or midwives must not worry or be concerned about being called racist due to stereotyping of certain cultures as this is clearly not the intent. I would rather be called racist and prevent this horrendous act being performed on one more child than to do nothing.”

(Richens, 2014)

### Antenatal care and reversal of infibulation (deinfibulation)

It is important to identify women who have been cut when they first seek pregnancy care, and find out what type of FGM has been performed. It will be necessary to ask about FGM as they may not volunteer the information.

Apart from the usual screening and antenatal care, it is important to provide pregnant women with support specific to their needs around FGM. They may need counselling, advice, information and social and psychological support. It is equally important to remember that a pregnant women under the age of 18 will be subject to the mandatory duty to report and safeguarding processes if found to have been subjected to FGM. Teenagers may need extra support, particularly as there will be safeguarding issues to be addressed.

Reversal or deinfibulation (which is considered a better term to describe this process, because it is not possible to reverse the consequences of FGM), is best performed before or at least within the second trimester of pregnancy at around 20 weeks of gestation. This avoids the need to cut the scar tissue in labour and reduces the possibility of extensive lacerations that can occur when the fetal head stretches the scarred or closed introitus and perineum. These may involve the urethra, bladder and rectum if uncontrolled and leave the woman with a fistula. It will also reduce the risk of fetal asphyxia or stillbirth if a woman progresses unaided to the second stage of labour.
Surgical deinfibulation should be offered where appropriate. Partners should be involved in decision making when the woman is willing for this to happen. It is important to work out an agreed care plan with the woman early in pregnancy, and to involve interpreters as necessary. Even fairly competent English speakers may have problems understanding medical terminology; therefore using a trained interpreter may be wise in order to avoid misunderstandings. Caesarean section is not indicated just because a woman has had FGM performed. The midwife should always assess the need for an elective episiotomy in labour.

It must be noted, however, that women may be reluctant to undergo deinfibulation until labour commences, because this may be normal practice in their country of origin. This reinforces the importance of careful and sensitive explanation in pregnancy of why antenatal deinfibulation is preferable. It also underlines the importance of all midwives understanding what to do in this situation. It is also essential to inform women that they may still need a standard (posterior) medio-lateral episiotomy for fetal distress in the second stage of labour. This should be explained because women may be very disappointed if they have to have perineal suturing after the birth, despite having had a deinfibulation in pregnancy.

The aim of deinfibulation is to restore normal anatomy as far as possible, which may be very limited depending on the damage caused originally. The procedure is the same in principle whether it is carried out as an elective procedure before pregnancy, in the antenatal period, or in labour itself. It can be performed by a midwife if necessary during the first stage of labour once the presenting part is low.

Principles of good practice include:

• adequate pain relief (general, regional or local anaesthesia) is essential; non pregnant women may prefer to have general anaesthesia because the procedure can bring back very traumatic memories of when they were cut

• using aseptic techniques following cleansing of the vulval area; also pay careful attention to hand washing and wear gloves

• examine the vulval area carefully, infiltrate with local anaesthetic and then open the scar in the midline, exposing the underlying tissues which may include the clitoris

• a midline incision along the scar is less likely to bleed heavily and will follow a line that may already have areas of weakness where the original healing of the edges was incomplete; it can be easier to do this if the tissue is carefully lifted along the midline with a finger or blunt instrument

• if the clitoris is present and can be palpated, an experienced practitioner can extend the incision to expose the clitoris and free any para-clitoral adhesions; if uncertain, cutting should stop when the urinary meatus is visible

• suture the raw edge on each side of the labia with fine dissolvable sutures to ensure haemostasis and an over-sewing stitch; this is important also to ensure the raw edges do not fuse together

• provide adequate analgesia following the deinfibulation

• if there is extensive fibrosis of the vaginal introitus, perhaps from the use of corrosive substances or angurya cuts, an episiotomy may be needed

• provide advice on good personal hygiene, especially keeping the area clean

• couples should be advised to avoid intercourse until healing has occurred and to use a lubricant if necessary

• women need to be advised that urine and menstrual flow may appear heavier because of the removal of the scar-tissue barrier.

The deinfibulation procedure is illustrated in Diagram 7.
If reversal of the infibulation has not already been performed, it needs to be carried out during the first stage of labour using adequate analgesia. If the second stage has already been reached, a midline incision must be used.

**Suturing a laceration or an episiotomy**

It is of course important to repair a laceration or episiotomy, to stem the bleeding. If the woman did not have a deinfibulation during the antenatal period, midwives often perform an anterior episiotomy and this will require careful repair. The key is to ensure that both the urethra and introitus are able to be seen following repair.

Re-suturing or reinfibulation or closing should never be considered or offered. This may mean that careful discussions have to be held with the woman and family to explain the law and why reinfibulation has to be refused. Women may themselves request reinfibulation for social reasons or because they have known nothing else (Momah, 2005).

It is necessary to follow up with the woman during the postnatal period. Support, information and counselling continue to be very important. Health care professionals who participate in FGM or reinfibulation may be removed from their respective professional registers.

The most important points to remember are to:

- ensure early identification – during antenatal booking or first visit
- arrange for deinfibulation during the first stage of labour with adequate pain relief
- support the woman with sensitivity
- notify her health visitor, GP and other professionals if the baby born is a girl, with regard to safeguarding the child; this is also to provide ongoing information and support to the family
- continue to provide postnatal support
- consider referring to an organisation that can offer additional support and information.

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**Diagram 7 – Cutting open the scar**

Care in labour

Principles of good practice include:

- normal care is required during the first stage of labour; usual sensitivity is essential
- there is no need to pass a catheter unless the woman is unable to pass urine
- deinfibulation may need to be carried out during the first stage of labour
- midwives need to watch women who have undergone type 3 FGM closely during the second stage of labour, even when the woman’s introitus has previously been assessed as adequate for the birth; unexpected problems may occur with descent of the fetal head or stretching of the perineum because the scar tissue around the vagina and perineum may be unstable
- a medio-lateral episiotomy should be performed in the second stage of labour only if unavoidable
- it is important to explain the requirements of UK law
- it is not acceptable to reinfibulate or stitch the woman back closed after the birth.
Figure 11 contains case studies that may help with considering the issues which may arise in practice.

**Figure 11 – Case studies**

**Case study 1**
A midwife helped a woman to give birth who had undergone type 3 FGM. Following the birth, the midwife is confronted by the woman’s husband asking that she reinfibulate his wife, saying “put my wife back to how she was before she had the baby”:
- what should the midwife have done?
- how should she have addressed the husband?
- what information is there to support midwives in persuading husbands to change their attitudes?

**Case study 2**
A young woman who had undergone type 3 FGM arrived on the labour ward in strong labour. As a midwife with no experience of caring for women who have experienced FGM:
- what would you do?
- how would you handle her care?
- what are the legal issues?
Conclusion

FGM is a global and national issue, although significant progress has been achieved, there are many challenges ahead that must not be underestimated. In many cities across the UK there are pockets of good practice, support groups and professional expertise which is well established and accessible. Nevertheless, there is a continuing need to extend services and provide resources to accommodate the needs of women, girls, families and communities to support their health and wellbeing.

Education is a critical tool in the fight to change attitudes to FGM and eradicate this violence from society; teaching about FGM and its consequences should be imbedded in school education, as well as pre- and post-qualifying education for all those involved in caring for girls and women.

Women and girls who have been abused need particular and sensitive support, together with access to facilities to help them with the physical, psychological and social consequences of this potentially devastating abuse. All professionals, practising communities and the public have a role to play in this social change towards eradication. Change can only take place to keep women and girls safe if practising communities are involved at all stages of child protection and service provision.

FGM also demands professional curiosity and awareness by those who come in contact with girls and women, including those health care professionals who may themselves have come from FGM practising communities. A further challenge for many is to consider how awareness raising can be enhanced simply by voicing concerns, speaking to colleagues and engaging in the campaign to end this violation of basic human rights. This should also include being sensitive to how students or colleagues may react to learn that such mutilation takes place. Nurses and midwives have a role to play by being politically engaged in movements that impact on care, and this is particularly so with FGM.

FGM is a complex issue and requires vigilance, as well as continuing engagement with the legislation, and the changing scene of caring for girls and women who may be at risk or may have been mutilated by FGM.

Tackling FGM requires a multi-agency approach and response through a recognised pathway that supports quality, evidence-based care and safeguarding. It is the responsibility of all nurses and midwives, working both in city and rural locations, to recognise FGM as abuse and to know who their local contacts are for support, training and action should they have a concern.
References and further reading


HM Government (2014) There is no justification for FGM – it is child abuse and it is illegal (Government declaration to end FGM in the UK and abroad, issued to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, 6 February 2014). Available at www.gov.uk (accessed February 2016).


Information Standards Board for Health and Social Care (2014) ISB 1610 female genital mutilation prevalence dataset: standard specification, ISB: Leeds. Available at www.isb.nhs.uk (accessed February 2016). (Note: the ISB closed on 31 March 2014, and responsibility has transferred to the Standardisation Committee for Care Information (SCCI). Approved information standards in the library on the ISB website remain current and will continue to be updated, on approval of changes by SCCI.)


Royal College of Nursing


Resources

RCN FGM resources can be found at www.rcn.org.uk/fgm

Home Office resources can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/fgm-support-materials

Department of Health resources on FGM can be found at www.gov.uk/search?q=dh+fgm

NHS England resources on FGM can be found at www.england.nhs.uk/2014/12/08/fgm-prevention and www.england.nhs.uk/2015/08/03/vanessa-lodge

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists resources on FGM can be found at www.rcog.org.uk

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health resources on FGM can be found at www.rcpch.ac.uk/fgm
FGM support services in the UK

Acton African Well Women Centre
Acton Health Centre 35 – 61 Church Road
London W3 8QE
Tel: 0208 383 8716; 07956 001065

African Well Women Clinic
McNair Centre
Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospital
St Thomas Street
London SE1 9RT
Tel: 020 7955 2381

African Well Woman’s Clinic
Northwick Park and St Mark’s Hospital
Watford Road, Harrow
Middlesex HA1 3UJ
Tel: 020 8869 2870

African Women’s Clinic University College Hospital
Clinic 3, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Unit
Euston Rd
London WC1E 6DH
Tel: 020 7380 9300
* UCLH also has a specialist clinic for child victims of FGM.

African Women’s Clinic
4 Carol Street
London NW1 0HU
Tel 020 7482 2786
admin@women-and-health.org

African Women’s Health Clinic
Whittington Hospital, Level 5
Highgate Hill, London N19 5NF
Tel: 020 7288 3482

Birmingham Heartlands Hospital
Princess of Wales Women’s Unit
Labour Ward
Bordesley Green East, Birmingham
Tel: 0121 424 3514

Bristol Community Rose Clinic
Lawrence Hill Health Centre
Hassell Drive
Bristol BS2 0AN
Email: bristolrose.clinic@nhs.net
Tel: 07813 016911

Central Liverpool PCT
FGM Advocacy Worker Rahima Farah
Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre
4 Princes Street Liverpool L8 1TH
Tel: 051 285 6370 (direct)

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
Gynaecology and Midwifery Departments
369 Fulham Road
London SW10 9NH
Tel: 020 8746 8000

Central Health Clinic
1 Mulberry Street, Sheffield S1 2PJ
Tel: 0114 271 8865

Leytonstone Community Health Project
Kirkdale House, 7 Kirkdale Road
Leytonstone, London E11 1HP
Tel: 020 8928 2244

Liverpool Women’s NHS Foundation Trust
Multi-Cultural Antenatal Clinic
Crown Street, Liverpool L8 7SS
Tel: 0151 708 9988

St Mary’s Hospital
Gynaecology and Midwifery Departments
Praed Street, London W2
Tel: 020 7886 6666
Organisations and support groups

**England**
Black Women’s Health and Family Support (BWHAFS)
82 Russia Lane
London E2 9LU
Tel: 020 8980 3503
[www.bwhafs.com](http://www.bwhafs.com)
[bwhfs@btconnect.com](mailto:bwhfs@btconnect.com)

London Child Protection Committee
Association of London Government
59 1/2 Southwark Street
London SE1 0AL
Tel: 020 7934 9999

Midlands Refugee Council
5th Floor, Smithfield House
Digbeth
Birmingham B5 6BS
Tel: 0121 242 2200

WoMan Being Concern International
K405 Tower Bridge Business Complex
100 Clements Road
London SE16 4DG
Tel: 020 7740 1306
[www.womanbeing.org](http://www.womanbeing.org)

**Scotland**
International Women’s Centre
49 Lyon Street
Dundee DD4 6RA
Tel: 01382 462058
[www.diwc.co.uk](http://www.diwc.co.uk)

Save the Children Scotland
Haymarket House
8 Clifton Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5DR
Tel: 0131 527 8200
[www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland)

Scottish Refugee Council
5 Cadogan Square (170 Blythswood Court)
Glasgow G2 7PH
Tel: 0141 248 0799
[www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

Dignity Alert & Research Forum (DARF)
UN House, 4 Hunter Square
Edinburgh, EH1 1QW
Tel: 07583 434602
Email dignityalert@hotmail.co.uk

Saheliya
125 McDonald Road
Edinburgh EH7 4NW
Tel: 0131 556 9302
Email: info@saheliya.co.uk

**Northern Ireland**
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
3rd Floor, Ascot House
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DB
Tel: 028 9023 8645 / 028 90319666
[www.nicem.org.uk](http://www.nicem.org.uk)
Wales

Bawso
9 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HA
Tel: 029 20 644633 or 24 hour helpline 0800 7318147
www.bawso.org.uk

Central African Association
11 Richmond Road
Cardiff CF24 3AQ
Tel: 029 2045 9945

MEWN Cymru – Minority Ethnic Women’s Network, Wales
1st floor, Coal Exchange
Mount Start Square
Cardiff CF10 5EB
Tel: 029 2046 4445
www.mewn-cymru.org.uk

SPA Somali Advice and Information Office
68 James Street
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
Tel: 029 2049 9916

Welsh Refugee Council
Phoenix House
389 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 1TP
Tel: 029 2048 9800
www.welshrefugeecouncil.org

National and international groups

FGM National Group
www.fgmnationalgroup.org

FORWARD (Foundation for Women’s Health, Research and Development)
Unit 4, 765-767 Harrow Road
London NW10 5NY
Tel: 020 8960 4000
www.forwarduk.org.uk
forward@forwarduk.org.uk
Appendices

Appendix 1
Map showing the global distribution of FGM

UNICEF global databases, 2016, based on DHS, MICS and other nationally representative surveys, 2004-2015
Appendix 2
The Bristol story

The Bristol model for FGM has its roots in many different areas. The main focus started when a school nurse and teacher began working in partnership to consider the needs of their school community. In 2006, they attended training which explored faith and cultural issues and the impact of these on the child protection agenda. The event marked a turning point for the professionals, who began to ask questions to see if they could identify if FGM had taken place or a child was at risk of having FGM. They found that the more they asked, the more they discovered – and the more cases they identified.

Some parents were considering FGM for their daughters but were unaware of UK law or the related health implications associated with FGM. The teacher and nurse began to refer cases to social care and the police, and soon realised they were becoming to be seen as local experts.

The school nurse realised she was picking up health concerns in girls who had FGM. These girls and their families had been seeking health care; however, the health departments were not always aware of the associated issues. For example, one indicator was recurrent urinary tract infections. No one was asking the question; ‘Have you been cut, circumcised or had FGM?’

There were also pockets of professionals and some community members working locally to end FGM, but there was no co-ordinated city-wide approach.

The school health nurse and teacher approached the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board for support and to increase the co-ordination of work related to FGM. A multi-agency group developed guidelines to support professionals in recognising and managing suspected or known cases of FGM. These guidelines examined the risk to women and girls from FGM, the need to develop a health promotion strategy and how to effectively safeguard those at risk.

Midwives also developed guidance to ensure a consistent approach that was fair and recognised the cultural needs of the women. The guidance was endorsed by women who were campaigning to raise awareness within their community that FGM is illegal, is not a religious requirement and can be harmful to the woman and her unborn baby.

Both these guidelines referenced professional guidance provided by Royal Colleges such as the RCN, RCM and BMA. Multi-agency and single-agency training was set up and priority groups were identified – considered key in educating families about the risks of FGM and highlighting the legal and child protection issues. The groups identified included midwives, health visitors, GPs, school health nurses, practice nurses, emergency departments, and obstetrics and gynaecology staff.

Systems were set up for effective information sharing which evidenced families had been given information and to ensure other professionals continued the health promotion work by reinforcing the message at major consultations. These include maternity care, immunisations, foreign travel, health checks, cervical cytology, sexual health counselling and support, family planning and PSHE training within school.

Working together with communities affected by FGM and other agencies, health professionals can raise awareness and end FGM. The Bristol model is a way of working in partnership; listening to the needs of those affected, developing services to meet their needs and always responding to the wider safeguarding issues, by recognising the risk to the child being seen while considering the risk to their siblings and their wider family network.

The main areas of learning from the Bristol model are to engage the community, listen to the voice of young people, ensure adequate training; how to recognise FGM and respond appropriately to safeguard girls at risk. Partnership working with other agencies helps
embed understanding of FGM in all practices, so it is sustained and is not the responsibility of one or two who may move on or leave. Key to success is raising awareness in affected communities so they understand the health professionals’ duty to safeguard and protect.

Jacalyn Mathers, Designated nurse safeguarding children, Bristol CCG

Further information on the Bristol model is available at www.bava.org.uk
Appendix 3
Department of Health NHS England Overview of the FGM mandatory reporting duty

FGM Mandatory reporting duty

Are you concerned that a child may have had FGM or be at risk of FGM?

Professional who initially identified the FGM (you) calls 101 (police) to make a report.

Mandatory reporting duty applies

You have observed a physical sign appearing to show your patient has had FGM.

Her parent / guardian discusses that the girl has had FGM.

You consider the girl to be at risk of FGM. To consider what action to take, refer to the DH FGM safeguarding and risk assessment guidance (see link overleaf).

A social care referral may not be required at this point. Follow local safeguarding procedures.

If a girl appears to have been recently cut or you believe she is at imminent risk, act immediately – this may include phoning 999.

REMEMBER: Mandatory reporting is only one part of safeguarding against FGM and other abuse. Always ask your local safeguarding lead if in doubt.
Appendix 4
Tackling FGM in England

Diagrammatic representation of how government departments and NHS in England work together to ensure all nurses and midwives understand their role, and work collaboratively across different agencies to best support women and girls affected by FGM.

Department of Education
Guidance for teachers, including nursery schools

Department of Health
National FGM prevention programme

Ministry of Justice/Home Office
Law enforcement, including prosecutions and UK Borders Agency

Department of International Development/Foreign and Commonwealth Office
International campaign: a £35 million programme to support the Africa-led movement to end FGM and is supporting work in 17 countries

NHS England
Operational strategy for implementation across health and social care
Reporting of FGM cases by NHS trusts.

Public Health England
Safeguarding

Health Education England
Developing multi-professional e-learning modules

Royal Colleges and professional, doctors, nurses, midwives, police, teachers, social workers support systems

Nurses and midwives understanding FGM and the safeguarding procedures to support best practice

Women and girls, fathers, partners, families, communities and support groups, media and public
Appendix 5
Contributors

Carmel Bagness, Professional Lead Midwifery and Women’s Health, RCN
Gerald Chan, Director, Health Policy and Public Relations, RCOG
Chris Cox, Director of Legal Services, RCN
Corina Christos, School Nurse Team Leader, Lambeth PCT
Alison Davies, Associate Director (Professional Practice), RCN
Lizzie Dowd, Parliamentary Adviser, RCN
Lorraine Forster, Head of Nursing Sexual Health, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
Janet Fyle, Professional Adviser, RCM
Anne-Marie Inkson-Smith, School Health Sister, Central and North West London Foundation Trust
Karen Jewell, Consultant Midwife Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
Anna Jones, Designated Nurse, Havering Clinical Commissioning Group
Caroline Jones, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales
Vanessa Lodge, Director of Nursing, North Central and East London, NHS England (London Region)
Samantha Manners, Administrator, RCN
Carolyn Mason, Head of Professional Development, RCN NI
Jackie Mathers, Designated Nurse for safeguarding Children, Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group
Dr Comfort Momoh, MBE, Public Health Specialist, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust
Wendy Norton, Senior Lecturer, De Montfort University, Leicester
Yana Richens, OBE, Consultant Midwife Public Health and Professional Global Advisor, RCM
Fiona Smith, Professional Lead Children and Young People, RCN
Glenys White, Named Nurse Safeguarding Children, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust Safeguarding Children’s Team
Angus Wilson, Assistant Adviser-Acute Care, RCN

Comfort Momoh, FGM and Public Health Specialist Midwife
Dr Gillian Barber, Maternal and Reproductive Health Specialist and Social Anthropologist
Carolyn Basak, RCN Midwifery and Women’s Health Adviser
Chris Cox, Assistant Director of RCN Legal Services
Sarah Creighton, Consultant Gynaecologist, The African Women’s Clinic, University College London
David Evans, Programme Manager, RCN Sexual Health Skills distance learning course
Kathy French, RCN Sexual Health Adviser
Mr Harry Gordon, OBGYN, Hammersmith Hospital
Adwoa Kwateng-kluvitse, Director, Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development
Myra Lamont, Associate Director, Sandyford Initiative, Glasgow
Yana Richens, OBE, Consultant Midwife Public Health and Postnatal Care, University College London
Fiona Smith, RCN Children’s and Young People’s Nursing Adviser
John Thain, Chair, RCN Safeguarding Children and Young People Forum and Senior Lecturer in Children’s Nursing