

PE1823/H

Petitioner submission of 5 December 2020

I would like to provide this written submission in response to the written submissions of 2nd and 5th November by RCOG and RCPE.

Firstly, I am completely in agreement with both parties that any scanning procedure is not without risk and complications. But no medical procedure is without risk and complication, and as RCOG state in their submission, the risks are no greater than those for any existing prenatal test. I appreciate it could be costly to implement and also fully appreciate the increased anxiety it could potentially cause. I also fully agree that not all conditions will be detected by body scans. That is why I emphasise again that these scans could be offered to parents if they wish to have one. Obviously not all parents will choose to have their babies scanned, but those who have been in my situation previously (having lost a child to a rare, hidden brain condition) may want to have one for future offspring. Should parents not be allowed to make that choice? That one scan could potentially save a child's life. I appreciate that it might not be cost effective to test for rare conditions such as AVM, but how would one feel if they were in the parent's shoes? Obviously, a parent will do anything in their power to ensure that their child receives the best possible care. Every baby has the right to live. Should a baby be denied a potentially life saving scan just because it is not cost effective? That's why instead of perhaps making these scans routine, give the parent the choice of whether to accept the scans or not.

As mentioned in my previous submission, medical research is advancing all the time. Perhaps in time, less risky procedures will be introduced. But until then, body scans are surely the best resource we have? Recent research by scientists at Gowerlabs, UCL, Cambridge University and the Rosie Hospital has demonstrated technology that allows the brain of a baby to be scanned without the need for sedation. It uses high density diffuse optical tomography which allows a baby's brain to be scanned during moments of natural activity. It is in the form of a swimming cap device that is worn on the baby's head while the baby is still awake. The cap consists of hexagonal electronic sensor modules that emit and detect near infra red light, and produces images similar to those produced by f MRI technology. This allows the brains of healthy babies to be studied, with the aim of developing new diagnostic methods and ways of monitoring conditions when things go wrong (www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-55062221).

This method is currently being tested on 6 month old babies, but hopefully can be adapted to test all babies. With such potential diagnostic methods in the pipeline, surely parents should be given the option of whether they want their babies to have such scans or not? Such promising research strengthens the case that babies can be potentially given brain and body scans safely and that this petition should not be dismissed without further consideration.

In addition, the submission by RCOG states that further investment and research should be given towards the diagnosis of rare and hidden conditions such as AVM. As it is, very little is known about such conditions and more research will only help with understanding, detecting and potentially treating such fatal conditions.

In summary, I fully agree with the submissions from RCOG and RCPE that subjecting neonates to body scans is risky, expensive and can lead to complications and cause further unwanted anxiety to parents. But parents who have sadly experienced conditions such as AVM will be anxious and worried anyway. That's why such scans should be made optional so the parent has the right to decide whether to have their baby scanned or not. Surely every baby has a right to live, and with medical science advancing all the time, there could potentially soon be a better diagnostic methods and hopefully cures for such rare conditions. That one body scan could potentially save a child's life. Who are we to deny this?