I am writing to explain why, as a doctor living and working Northern Ireland, I want to see the existing abortion law in our country preserved.

Here are my 3 main reasons why:

1. **If we want to have true equality at the heart of our law, we must preserve human rights for everyone – men, women and unborn children**

A lot of the arguments being thrown around on social media shout at us that abortion law reform would bring “basic human rights” to women to allow them to “take control over their own bodies”. What these people don’t address is that abortion actually undermines human rights – the right to life of the unborn child, the most vulnerable in our society. Just because a person doesn’t have a voice doesn’t mean we don’t consider how to act in their best interests.

Every day on the hospital wards I grapple with complex issues of acting in the best interests of people without capacity to speak or decide for themselves. And in the same way that I fight to ensure that I block out insensitive suggestions from family members of patients who may not want what’s in the patient’s best interests to make life easier for them (eg putting an elderly relative into a care home against their wishes, so the family can claim the house as their own and don’t need to give up free time to provide care), I want to fight for the best interests of unborn children – lives packed with potential – unable to speak for themselves, and who need their own human rights considered.

2. **The overwhelming majority of abortions in the rest of the UK are carried out for social reasons**

One of the largest systematic reviews I have read on the topic was entitled ‘Induced Abortion and Mental Health’ from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in December 2011 which stated that "the majority (98%) of abortions carried out in the UK in 2010 were on the grounds that continuing with the pregnancy would risk physical or psychological harm to the women or child” (pg.9). And from more recent reading, I can see that these figures for the UK have still not changed from the 98% mentioned in that review.

In other words, these 98% of abortions are **NOT** being carried out secondary to rape, incest or even to save the life of the mother, but are done because there may be “physical or psychological harm” further down the line. Any newly pregnant person could argue that an unexpected child will alter life plans and will have some form of psychological impact, and therefore medical professionals do not have a leg to stand on in trying to explain alternative options for these pregnancies. This creates a culture of abortion on demand, for no reason other than inconvenience in a large number of cases.

3. **The consequences of an abortion on women’s mental health are vast and underreported**

Abortion is not like simply pressing the ‘Delete’ key on a keyboard. There are a whole range of emotions that the woman involved will have to contend with for the rest of her life. The pain of each anniversary of the abortion. Swirling, recurring feelings of mourning, loss, guilt and helplessness.

And even if people don’t experience these feelings as a consequence of having an abortion, their mental health will **NOT** improve as a result of having an abortion. So the literature says anyway. In that same systematic review (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2011), it argues that abortion does
not improve mental health outcomes for women with unplanned pregnancies, and does not offer any real protection from mental health problems. In short, that must mean that 98% of abortions in the UK are technically bad practice from doctors, going against the scientific evidence base which consistently states there will be no improvement in psychological wellbeing from helping someone have an abortion.

This is not me saying that I don’t want to protect women’s rights. I ABSOLUTELY DO. I just don’t feel that the abortion rules in England, Wales and Scotland protect them at all. The first-line treatment for a woman with an unwanted pregnancy should be proper support and care, a non-judgmental listening ear and the immediate input of counsellors and health professionals (and not just abortions to anyone and everyone without a passing thought for the lady in front of them or the unborn child who doesn’t yet have their own voice).

For these reasons and others besides, I appeal to you to please uphold the existing Abortion Law in Northern Ireland.

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