

23rd May 2016

Mr. David Jordan
Director, Editorial Policy and Standards
BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London, W1A 1AA

Dear Mr. Jordan,

We are extremely concerned about some of the content in recent episodes of the BBC One drama "In the Club", in which characters in roles as midwives have indicated that a reduction in a baby's movements is normal in the later stages of pregnancy and that it is not something for pregnant mothers to be concerned about. Sadly talking to your complaints line had little impact and we received an unsatisfactory response (attached). Given the importance of the message we feel our only option is to convey this message more formally in this co-signed letter.

NHS England, health professionals, and charities all over the country are working tirelessly to correct this myth. The UK has one of the worst stillbirth rates in the developed world: (10 babies are stillborn every day and one third of those occur at full term)¹. Much collaborative effort, both national and international, is being put into changing that fact.

Such inaccurate information is in conflict with messages regarding reduced fetal movements in the national hand held maternity notes given to women to track their health during pregnancy. In March 2016, NHS England launched its new "Saving Babies' Lives" Care Bundle², a national initiative for health professionals identifying key areas to focus on with the aim of reducing UK stillbirth rates and preventing avoidable stillbirths wherever possible. A central tenet of this initiative is raising awareness of the significance of a reduction in a baby's movements and effective intervention where necessary. Furthermore, NHS England also published an information leaflet created for women regarding reduced fetal movements³.

Sadly, we believe that the BBC's content in "In The Club" is undermining all this vital work to save babies lives. Broadcasting this inaccuracy may be falsely reassuring mothers that their reduction in babies movements is normal and lead them not to seek help from their maternity units. This incorrect advice may be responsible for future avoidable stillbirths in the UK, and clearly breaches the BBC's Editorial Guidelines Section 3 (Accuracy) in both Principles and Avoiding Misleading Audiences. As members of stillbirth charities and health professionals, we believe that it is essential that this misinformation is corrected, and furthermore that it is not promoted in future.

The Royal College of Midwives (a signatory on this letter), have offered to work with the BBC to advise on maternity scenes for any future programmes. This would be a great way to ensure that any advice you are given is contemporaneous and accurate.

As a matter of the utmost urgency, we request that future episodes of this programme are broadcast with advisory messages at the beginning and end of each episode stating: Babies movements should not slow down at the end of pregnancy. It is NHS advice that if you notice any change in your baby's regular pattern of movement, contact your maternity unit straight away. Do not wait until the next day. Visit mamaacademy.org.uk or tommys.org for more information.

We look forward to your prompt action and confirmation that our request has been implemented.

1<https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrance-uk/reports>

2<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/saving-babies-lives-car-bundl.pdf>

3<http://www.mamaacademy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Feeling-Baby-Move-Leaflet.pdf>

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Eldridge

Chief Executive Officer, MAMA Academy

heidi@mamaacademy.org.uk

07427 851670

Chris Binnie

Treasurer, Our Angels

chris@ourangelscharity.co.uk

07775 430504

Co-signed by:

Dr Alexander Heazell (Senior Clinical Lecturer in Obstetrics, University of Manchester)

Carrie-Ann Curtis (Founder, Charles Angel Centre, Charity Registration pending)

Jane Brewin (CEO, Tommy's, Reg. Charity 1060508)

David Ward (CEO, Abigail's Footprints, Reg. Charity 1149005)

Debbie Howard (Director, *Still Loved*, documentary film about stillbirth)

Nick Wilkie (CEO, National Childbirth Trust, Reg. Charity 801395)

Emma Brewer (Founder, Kitty's Dream, Charity Registration pending)

Emma Lofthouse (Chair, Our Angels, Reg. Charity 1161714)

Gail Johnson (Professional Education Advisor, Royal College of Midwives)

Professor Jane Sandall (Social Science and Women's Health, King's College London)

Prof. Jason Gardosi (Director, Perinatal Institute)

Jennifer & Christopher Reid (Founders, Teddy's Wish, Reg. Charity 1160286)

Judith Abela (Acting Chief Executive, Sands, Reg. Charity 299679)

Mel Scott (Trustee, Towards Tomorrow Together, Reg. Charity 1151022)

Rebecca Schiller (Founder, Birthrights, Reg. Charity 1151152)

Ryan & Amy Jackson (Founders, The Lily Mae Foundation, Reg. Charity 1149341)

Appendix

RCOG Greentop Guidelines on reduced Fetal Movements

https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/gtg_57.pdf

Response from BBC Complaints

"Thank you for contacting us about in the club.

I understand that you felt our Midwife character Vicky, made irresponsible comments regarding reduced fetal activity.

I asked the programme makers to address your feedback and they explained they worked closely with a number of midwife consultants throughout the production process of the series. They not only advised on the script, but were also on set for the filming of the medical scenes. What Vicky said was informed by real life working midwives and it reflected the reassuring statements they would have given the expectant mother in the knowledge she was about to be seen by a consultant and receive medical attention.

I hope this has helped to address your concerns and thanks again for taking the time to contact us."