

# Down's daughter must not be sterilised, judge tells parents

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

THE parents of a "tactile" and "affectionate" woman with Down's syndrome have been forbidden from having her sterilised to allay their fears that she might become pregnant.

A judge at the Court of Protection in London ruled that it would be disproportionate and unnecessary to perform an invasive procedure on the 21-year-old.

The court heard that the woman, a student, who can be named only as K, does not have a boyfriend and had not expressed an interest in a relationship.

But her parents had grown concerned that she could be taken advantage of. They had become convinced that she needed sterilisation to protect her for the future, Mr Justice Cobb, explained in a judgment made public yesterday.

He said K was "by every account, a delightful, warm, engaging and affectionate young woman".

He added: "Theirs is a loving, close, devoted and supportive family.

"In every respect in which I have read about the care which K receives at home, there is nothing but praise for Mr and Mrs K, and their devotion to K."

The parents had been to see a specialist, adamant that she needed to be sterilised, which he initially supported. But a

second doctor suggested various methods of contraception as an alternative.

K's parents were alarmed, writing to the first doctor that they felt that "to do nothing is a very unsatisfactory outcome; it is our intention in the future and before [K] leaves our care to take her abroad to seek assistance with this matter both privately and confidentially".

They agreed not to take her out of the country after an initial court hearing.

In a report, Dr Samuel Rowlands, an expert in reproductive health, commissioned by the court, concluded that there was "no clinical need" for sterilisation.

He said that the use of contraception should be explored instead, should the need arise.

The judge said: "Although Mr and Mrs K expressed concerns that K is occasionally 'tactile' and 'overfamiliar', that she has begun to be more aware of the 'opposite sex', and is vulnerable to sexual exploitation, I note that K is well-supervised at home and at college; there is no evidence that she is seeking a sexual relationship.

"She is working with the community nurse to help her to reduce her vulnerability around others."

He added that potential complications of sterilisation, including damage to the bowel or bladder, had also to be borne in mind.