

Public rejects approval of abortion without seeing a doctor

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

ONLY one in 20 people agrees that women should be given the go-ahead for an abortion without having to see a doctor, a practice deemed acceptable in new draft guidelines.

Polling also shows overwhelming opposition to nurses carrying out terminations and strong backing for the idea that doctors who sign abortion forms without seeing the woman face-to-face should be disciplined.

The survey, by ComRes, was carried out after it emerged that new draft guide-

lines for abortion clinics, published by the Government, say that there is no legal requirement for doctors to have a consultation before authorising the procedure.

Britain's biggest abortion provider, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, said it should not be necessary for doctors to see the woman before signing.

An investigation by the Care Quality Commission, the watchdog, following disclosures in *The Daily Telegraph*, found last year that doctors routinely pre-signed consent forms without seeing patients.

Under the 1967 Abortion Act two doctors must sign in good faith that the legal requirements for a termination – such as that the health of the woman or child could be in jeopardy without it – have been met before the procedure can take place. But the draft guidelines, published for consultation by the Department of Health, say that neither of them needs to have seen the woman before signing. While it is “good practice” for at least one of the doctors to have met the woman, it is “not a legal requirement”.

Official figures recently showed that less than half of women who have abortions now see either of the doctors face-to-face before being granted approval.

In the ComRes poll last week, 84 per cent agreed with the statement that a woman requesting an abortion “should always be seen in person by a doctor”.

Dr Peter Saunders, the chief executive of the Christian Medical Fellowship, said: “This shows that the Department of Health is completely out of touch with public opinion on this issue.”

A Department of Health spokesman said “the law has required that two doctors certify in good faith that there are lawful grounds for any abortion”. Doctors must comply, the spokesman said.

Gay ‘cure’ bus ad Court questions Johnson’s ban

The banning of a Christian bus ad considered offensive to gay people should be examined, the Court of Appeal ruled yesterday.

Judges found that aides of Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, tried to make “political capital” out of the ban against Core Issues Trust, a counselling group that advocates therapy for gay people, in 2012.

The trust made a High Court challenge, claiming Mr Johnson used his position to win the gay vote. The High Court ruled that the ban was lawful and that the decision was taken solely by Transport for London.

However, the appeal court was shown an email sent by Guto Harri, Mr Johnson’s media chief, which read: “Boris has just instructed TfL to pull the adverts and I’ve briefed *The Guardian*.” The judges said this suggested Mr Johnson intervened and put his “motives” into question. They sent the case back to the High Court. A spokesman said the mayor agreed with TfL’s ban of the “offensive” ad.