

Bar on doctors who oppose 'five-day-after pill'

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

DOCTORS and nurses who object to providing emergency contraception on moral or religious grounds are being barred from specialist professional qualifications under official guidelines.

Roman Catholics and others with pro-life beliefs are "ineligible" for vital qualifications from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), even if they complete the training.

It has led to accusations that the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH), a branch of the RCOG, is

unfairly discriminating against medical staff who act on grounds of conscience. The bar applies to those who object to "any form of contraception" including the new morning-after pill which can be taken up to five days after sex.

Some Christian doctors who have no objection to traditional contraception decline to prescribe the "five-day-after pill" because it acts after fertilisation.

They believe that emergency contraception, which occurs after the moment they argue that "life" has begun, is similar to abortion. The exclusion applies to specialist diplomas in sexual and repro-

Targets Hospitals' 'blatant fraud' over waiting times

Some hospital trusts are skewing waiting list times to meet targets, MPs have said.

The Commons public accounts committee said public confidence in waiting times was being "undermined" by acts of "blatant fraud". Spot checks by the National Audit Office showed that more than half of the hospital trusts

inspected were either wrongly recording waiting list data or keeping incomplete records.

The committee also said there were rare cases of "blatant fraud". Police are investigating claims that cancer waiting times were falsified at Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust. Margaret Hodge, the

chairman of the committee, said: "Public confidence in the success hospitals have had in meeting the 18-week waiting time target is undermined by errors in trusts' recording."

Labour introduced targets in 2008 which state that 95 per cent of those needing outpatient treatment should wait no more than 18 weeks.

ductive health as well as full membership of the faculty.

The diplomas are viewed as an important qualification to enable GPs or nurses treating sexually transmitted infections or involved in family planning. Full membership is seen as essential for doctors who specialise in the field. The prohibition is confirmed in the latest version of the guidelines, amended after the qualifications were opened to nurses.

It states that those with moral objections are "welcome" to study the diploma course but adds: "Completing the syllabus means willingness during training to

prescribe all forms of hormonal contraception, including emergency, and willingness to counsel and refer, if appropriate, for all intrauterine methods.

"Failure to complete the syllabus renders candidates ineligible for the award of a FSRH Diploma."

The RCOG insisted that although the new guidelines were recently updated the exclusion was long-standing.

David Jones, director of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, the Roman Catholic institute in Oxford, said: "This is a form of unjust discrimination against professionals on the basis of their beliefs."