

Inspectors had to halt vulnerable patient's abortion

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

STAFF at Britain's biggest abortion provider tried to give a vulnerable woman a termination even though she did not understand what was happening, a damning report has found.

Inspectors were forced to intervene as the patient, who has learning disabilities, became distressed, amid a catalogue of failings uncovered at Marie Stopes clinics across the country.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC)

said the provider - which serves 70,000 women a year - was failing to ensure rules on consent were followed.

At one clinic, in Norwich, doctors were found to be "bulk signing" up to 60 consent forms at a time, with little indication that they were familiar with a patient's situation.

At another, in Sandwell, West Midlands, inspectors found "poor and insensitive" handling of a patient with learning difficulties who did not understand what was occurring. Inspectors

who visited the charity's headquarters found poor risk management, insufficient monitoring of consent and limited oversight of its 60 clinics.

In August, Marie Stopes International (MSI) suspended all terminations involving general anaesthetic and sedation, and all involving under 18s, after the CQC raised safety fears. Thousands of women waiting for abortions were instead referred to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and to NHS trusts.

The CQC has now issued 12 reports

describing the litany of failings at Marie Stopes clinics. At Norwich, foetal tissue was left in an "open hazardous waste bin" which was not emptied between cases, staff were not trained in how to respond to a deteriorating patient, and patients were put at risk because basic surgery checklists were not followed.

In south London, obtaining consent was left to nurses and healthcare assistants, in breach of laws which state this should be done by doctors.

In Maidstone, inspectors found fail-

ings in infection control systems, with poor hand hygiene, and failures in pre-surgical preparation.

The MSI group was allowed to recommence restricted services in October, after carrying out training in re-education, consent and governance.

Prof Edward Baker, deputy chief inspector of hospitals at the CQC, said: "Our inspections of Marie Stopes International from earlier this year identified a number of serious concerns, which were recognised in its tempo-

rary suspension of specific types of termination in August." He said the group had made progress but would continue to be monitored very closely, with further action if necessary.

Suzanne Ash, interim managing director at Marie Stopes UK, said it had "learnt" from the issues raised. "Since the inspections, we've made considerable changes to our management, governance and assurance processes, including extensive training of staff and updating of policies," she said.