

Lessons Learned:

Child AF – Child Safeguarding Practice Review



Child's Story

Child AF was born at approx. 24 weeks gestation in hospital following her mother going into early labour. Child AF died at one day old. Child AF was her mother's (known as Sophie) sixth pregnancy, her other siblings did not reside with Sophie due to concerns that they would be at risk of significant harm if Sophie was to care for them.

Sophie was known to agencies in Lancashire including Children's Social Care, Lancashire Constabulary and Health services. Sophie herself had experienced a difficult and traumatic childhood including being exposed to neglectful parenting, exposure to parental alcohol abuse and experiencing domestic abuse as a child. Sophie had been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder within previous care proceedings and professionals were worried about Sophie's ability to care for her children for a number of issues including her mental health, domestic abuse, use of illicit substances, neglect and sexual abuse.

Sophie chose to have a termination of pregnancy at 10 weeks gestation and whilst she attended for the first part of the termination procedure, she did not complete the procedure. Her pregnancy of Child AF was concealed in an attempt to prevent Children's Social Care from removing Child AF from her, after her birth. Concerns were raised that Sophie remained pregnant after attending for a termination and a pre-birth assessment was closed and uncompleted, as professionals accepted Sophie's self-reporting that she had terminated the pregnancy.

What we have Learnt

Understanding of termination procedures:

There was a lack of understanding across Children's Social Care staff as to how pregnancies are terminated, the different methods and local procedures. The review identified a need for training in this area. The lack of understanding of termination procedures caused confusion and assumptions were made that Sophie had terminated the pregnancy.

Communication and Information Sharing:

The review found that there was some good examples of communication and information sharing across agencies. However, there were some opportunities for agencies to improve their communication and particularly around the clarity of information shared between Children's Social Care and Health. Linked to the point above, this would have provided greater opportunity to understand that Sophie could have remained pregnant.

The relationship between Children's Social Care and the extended family was good and enabled family members to share their concerns with the sibling's social worker that Sophie remained pregnant despite her self-reporting to Children's Social Care.

The review identified that there was an over-reliance placed on Sophie's self-reporting that she was not pregnant despite family concerns raised and baby equipment being seen at her property. Sophie was not challenged on reports that she had been for private scans and was concealing the pregnancy.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust do not notify GPs within Primary Care when a woman attends for a termination procedure. The review found that information regarding terminations should be shared with GPs with patients' consent. In those cases where there are safeguarding concerns, GPs should always be informed of termination procedures as part of a multi-agency response and care plan to inform safeguarding.

Identification of vulnerabilities:

The review identified that there may have been earlier opportunities to diagnose Sophie with Autistic Spectrum Disorder given the previous involvement of Health and Children's Social Care in her other pregnancies. This may have informed decision-making in the case and provided other avenues of support for Sophie.

The review also identified that practitioners should be reminded to thoroughly review relevant files when cases are allocated to them to ensure that they are working with parents in line with their identified learning needs.

Support for vulnerable expectant mothers:

At the time of Sophie's attendance at the termination clinic, Sophie was not offered any enhanced package of support or care. The review found the current definitions of 'vulnerable' did not provide sufficient depth or guidance for practitioners. The review has recommended further work to enhance this definition and explore the offer of enhanced support and care.

Consideration of the Pan Lancashire Guidance on Concealed and Denied Pregnancy:

The review found several opportunities to convene multi-agency strategy meetings in line with the Pan-Lancashire Guidance on Concealed Pregnancies. The case has highlighted that all practitioners need to both be familiar with and confident in applying the guidance. In particular with this case, concerns were raised that Sophie was concealing a pregnancy and as such, liaison between Health and Children's Social Care should have taken place to arrange a scan rather than reliance on negative pregnancy tests (which can be falsified). Refusal to attend for the scan would have provided further indication that a pregnancy may have been concealed.

What do we need to do

- Read and familiarise yourself with the following guidance and documents:
 - Pan Lancashire Guidance on Concealed and Denied Pregnancy:
[Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com)
 - CSAP's 7MB on Concealed and Denied Pregnancy:
[Concealed-and-Denied-Pregnancy-2020-7MB.pdf \(lancshiresafeguarding.org.uk\)](https://lancshiresafeguarding.org.uk)
- Consider convening an early multi-agency strategy meeting in cases of suspected concealed pregnancy.
- Ensure that your allocated files are thoroughly reviewed to ensure that you are working with parents in line with their identified learning needs.
- Look out for and attend local training being developed on termination of pregnancy procedures.

Keep in Touch

Further learning and resources can be found on the [Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership website](#)

For queries or feedback please contact the Lancashire Safeguarding Business Unit at LSBU@lancashire.gov.uk