

In the United Kingdom, guidance from the Department of Health and Royal College of Nursing encourages "sensitive disposal" of fetal tissue after pregnancy loss, stating that individuals should be given verbal and written information on their options and the ability to participate in shared decision-making about management of fetal remains. This guidance was developed in acknowledgment of emotional issues around miscarriage, stillbirth and perinatal death, but extends to termination of pregnancy with the assumption that women undergoing elective abortion have similar concerns and needs. There is a lack of data regarding women's understanding of fetal tissue disposal after elective abortion. The meaning of sensitive disposal is also open to interpretation and methods vary: some abortion providers dispatch fetal tissue to a crematorium or allow women to take possession of the tissue for home or other forms of burial, while most incinerate it as clinical waste.

This qualitative study will explore women's understanding of disposal of fetal tissue following elective abortion. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 23 women who have undergone an elective abortion. Participants were sought who have had either a medical or surgical abortion, up to the legal gestational age limit of 24 weeks. The interviews were audio-taped and transcriptions are being analyzed for common themes. Findings of this study will be used to inform policy and will be submitted to peer-reviewed publications and for presentation at academic and scientific conferences.