Statement from BCCA regarding the “Safe and Sustainable” Paediatric cardiac surgical process

The British Congenital Cardiac Association (BCCA) represents professionals caring for patients with congenital heart disease.

The Safe and Sustainable Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Review has entered a crucial phase. Although the review has shown clearly that all centres in the UK, performing cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease, are safe, the BCCA remains supportive of the underlying principles of the review and in particular the need for fewer centres performing larger volumes of congenital cardiac procedures to improve the quality of care provided by the whole cardiac service.

Throughout this process the Department of Health has stressed that the review is not about saving money but about configuring a world-class service for children with heart problems, fit for purpose and able to adapt and grow with the needs of this increasingly complex patient group. This position has been welcomed by the BCCA. It has been of concern over many years that the care of these children has not received the resources it needs to deliver the level of service expected by patients and families. For example, the UK still has about half the number of consultant paediatric cardiologists required for the population based on recommendations over 5 years ago. In addition, the tertiary centres will need more surgeons and the outreach networks will need more paediatricians with paediatric cardiology expertise for improved service delivery. The BCCA’s support for this process has been predicated on adequate financial support for the implementation of the review. Without appropriate investment, there is the potential to make services worse and not better.

The BCCA believes that quality of service is key and where possible, the location of units providing paediatric cardiac surgery should reflect the distribution of the population to minimise disruption and strain on families. It has become increasingly clear throughout this review that paediatric cardiac surgery cannot be considered in isolation and that numerous inter-dependencies between key clinical services (from fetus to adult) must be reflected in the final decision. The BCCA welcomes the recognition by the review that the linking of paediatric and adult cardiac services is integral to providing high quality care. It is important that the centres designated to provide paediatric cardiac surgery must be equipped to deal with all of the needs of increasingly complex patients. For these services at each centre to remain sustainable in the long term, co-location of key clinical services on one site is essential.

18.2.2011