

AvMA is demanding an investigation into how the UK's system of regulation allowed thousands of women to be put at risk. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) had reports from women and solicitors well in advance of the announcements by the French government which forced the hand of the Department of Health and the MHRA to do something. There have been repeated calls for stronger regulation of private healthcare and cosmetic treatment in particular. An expert group on cosmetic treatment convened by the chief medical officer reported in 2005 with a range of recommendations, most of which have not been implemented. In some cases the Government has done the opposite of what experts advised, for instance by actually deregulating cosmetic laser treatment in full knowledge that this would lead to avoidable patient harm. In 2010 NCEPOD (National Enquiry into Peri Operative Deaths) published a damning report on the cosmetic surgery sector, pointing out glaring gaps in regulation.

Peter Walsh, chief executive of AvMA said:

"Naturally the first priority is to make sure all the women affected are safe. However, without reform of the regulatory system there will be further scandals like this. The MHRA has, not for the first time failed dismally in its responsibility to protect patients. It should be overhauled, and the Department of Health must act to introduce robust regulation of the private and cosmetic treatment sector. At the moment "freeing up" industry from regulation is given greater priority than patient safety. Dermal fillers and laser treatment are two disasters waiting in the wings."

AvMA are also calling for the introduction of a mandatory indemnity insurance scheme for healthcare devices to ensure people who are affected by faulty products (breast implants, pacemakers, hip replacements etc) are not left without a route of redress if the manufacturer goes bust like PIP, the breast implant company did. AvMA knows of hundreds of women affected who may not be able to obtain compensation.

Walsh added:

"The Government must share some of the responsibility for the implant scandal even if the treatment was in the private sector, because it is responsible for the regulatory system which failed. In the future, the industry - both manufacturers and private hospitals and clinics should bear the cost of making sure that there is a fund to replace devices like these and compensate patients where needed."