

We must work together to end FGM for good

I don't think a Health Secretary opening new NHS clinics has ever said this before, but I can't wait for the day we can close them down.

When we don't need these clinics anymore.

But the truth is: we do.

We desperately need these new clinics because British girls and British women need our help and support. And the NHS must be there for everyone.

Now, I'm not going to stand up here, in front of a room full of women, brave and courageous women, and try and explain FGM.

I don't think any man can ever fully appreciate what it's like to live in fear of, or live with the consequences of FGM.

But the question I ask myself is this: what if my daughter was at risk?

What if my wife needed help?

What would I expect from the National Health Service?

Expert medical help.

Specialists, who are trained in how to deal with both the physical effects of FGM, and the psychological scars.

Counselling and emotional support.

And I'd want that care and support to be close to where I live, in my community.

That's exactly what we're doing today.

These 8 new support clinics, across the country, will give women and girls the care and support they need in their communities.

Led by specialist midwives, supported by specialist consultants and counsellors, the expertise of the NHS, and FGM charities and organisations, coming together under one roof.

Our aim is to reach women sooner, before they engage with NHS maternity services when the risk of FGM complications is greatest and can threaten the life of a mother and her child.

The clinics will focus on education and prevention, as much as treatment and support, so they will be located away from hospitals, in communities where there is the greatest need.

And this is all possible because of the record £33.9 billion this government is putting into the health service so the NHS can be there for everybody.

I've seen the life-changing work being done at these clinics. The staff and survivors I met in Croydon were truly inspirational.

The holistic approach they're taking means that anyone who walks into one of these clinics is being treated as a person, rather than just as a patient.

Not just a medical problem to fix, but someone who has the power to help break the cycle, someone who has the power to help end FGM.

Nimco Ali, who has done so much to change how we think about FGM in this country, said: "The solution to ending FGM is to empower girls to be themselves."

And she's absolutely right. It's only through the tireless work of people like Nimco, and other fearless FGM campaigners, some of whom are in this room, that we've changed the conversation.

That we've stopped stigmatising people as victims and started empowering women and girls to speak up, and challenge, and change.

Because that's what we all want.

Now, I know that empowerment is one of the themes today along with positivity and hope – and God knows we could all do with a little hope right now.

Our focus must be on reaching that girl, somewhere in Britain right now, who thinks she is all alone. We must help her, care for her, listen to her, and give her a voice.

So I'm delighted to be here with you today in that spirit of empowerment and education, of prevention and protection.

And I hope that by working together we can end FGM for good.