

'Hundreds of women may have aborted perfectly healthy babies' after NHS staff at a major teaching hospital routinely failed to make vital checks

- Women at the University Hospital of Wales were given botched scans, which could have wrongly told them they had miscarried their babies
- Emily Wheatley, 31, almost went through with an abortion, but a scan at a different hospital showed that her baby was alive and well
- An investigation by the Ombudsman of Wales found that the hospital had been using outdated guidelines when diagnosing miscarriages
- It is now feared hundreds of women could have lost their babies

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Hundreds of pregnant women may have had healthy babies aborted after scanning blunders at a top hospital.

An investigation found that medics had been using a flawed procedure for scanning women who were at risk of losing their babies.

It is feared that many will have been wrongly told they had miscarried and given drugs to terminate the pregnancy.



Near miss: Emily Wheatley, 31, was wrongly told by staff that her daughter Ella, now eight months old, right, had died when she was nine weeks pregnant.

The 'fundamental error' in procedure goes back to 2006.

Midwives investigating miscarriages are recommended to use an internal transvaginal scan which is more accurate than the external Doppler ultrasound procedure.

The scandal came to light after Emily Wheatley, 31, was told she had miscarried at nine weeks following investigations at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff.

But when she attended a different hospital for treatment with drugs to remove the foetus in July 2012, staff carried out a further scan which revealed a baby's heartbeat. Miss Wheatley went on to give birth to a healthy baby but was 'traumatised' by the events.



Fears: In Ms Wheatley's case the error was spotted, and she gave birth to a healthy baby. But an investigation has raised fears that other women may not have been so lucky

'I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT HAD GOT IT WRONG'

Emily Wheatley yesterday spoke of her despair after being told by a midwife she could not detect a heartbeat during her first scan.

Another midwife repeated the procedure at the University Hospital of Wales, in Cardiff, but concluded she had suffered a silent miscarriage.

It was only when she went to Nevill Hall Hospital in Abergavenny that another scan revealed she was still pregnant. Miss Wheatley, of Monmouth, who is now mother to healthy eight-month-old Ella was left 'traumatised'.

She said: 'When I saw the baby clearly on the screen, I couldn't really believe that the University Hospital of Wales had got it wrong. I feel angry at the decision to not follow a simple process which could have prevented this misdiagnosis.'

Miss Wheatley, who suffers from polycystic ovary syndrome, added: 'It's just unbelievable that there are potentially other women out there who have been diagnosed with having a silent miscarriage. And they potentially have got rid of healthy babies – that frightens me.

'Maybe hundreds of babies have been lost because of their decision.'

The investigation found UHW staff were 'systematically failing' to perform the correct scans on women with suspected early pregnancy loss.

A damning report from Peter Tyndall, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, says well-established clinical guidance was ignored for seven years. The findings will be 'extremely disturbing' for women who have had terminations in that time, he said.

A spokesman for the Royal College of Gynaecologists, who issued the guidelines, yesterday said almost every unit in England was signed up and adhering to the recommended procedure.

Mr Tyndall has asked the Welsh Government to check that all health boards are now complying with the guidance.

A helpline received 28 calls yesterday, of which eight women were 'immediately reassured'.

Failings were discovered after a complaint by Miss Wheatley's mother about her daughter's treatment.



Apology: Representatives of University of Wales Hospital in Cardiff (pictured) have admitted they 'failed' in their duty to Ms Wheatley



'Systematic failing': Staff at the hospital had been using out-of-date guidelines for pregnancy scans, which led to false diagnoses

The report found that UHW did not tell staff to carry out the internal scans. Instead they relied on Doppler scans that in Miss Wheatley's case could have been 'potentially dangerous'.

Even when the guidance was re-worded in 2011 to emphasise the need for TV scans in early miscarriage, the UHW policy went unchanged.

Mr Tyndall criticised the Cardiff and Vale Health Board for not updating its guidelines and told them to pay Miss Wheatley £1,500 in compensation.

Mr Tyndall said: 'Were it not for the fortunate circumstance of [Miss Wheatley] seeking her post-miscarriage care at an alternative hospital, it seems likely that these failings would have resulted in the medical termination of a healthy, viable pregnancy.'

RCOG spokesman Siobhan Quenby said: 'This is a really big issue because we have to be 100 per cent certain that a miscarriage has taken place – 97 per cent is no good for the 3 per cent of women for whom the wrong diagnosis would be a disaster.'

Cardiff and Vale Health Board said it made an 'unreserved apology' to Miss Wheatley.

- **Anyone who feels they may have been affected can call 0800 952 0244 between 9am and 5pm until Monday.**