

Population Screening Act: Training sonographers to perform a first-trimester anomaly scan

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Executive summary

Health Council of the Netherlands



The regional centres for prenatal screening have developed a training programme for sonographers. This is in preparation for the nation-wide scientific study into the first-trimester anomaly scan at around the 13th week of pregnancy. Part of the training programme involves a skills training course, in which sonographers will practice on pregnant women. Prior to this training programme, the pregnant women will undergo a first-trimester scan conducted by an experienced trainer. This ensures that no congenital anomalies of the foetus are discovered during the training programme. Under the Population Screening Act (WBO), a permit is required for this preliminary first-trimester scan. At the request of the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS), the Committee on Population Screening of the Health Council of the Netherlands has assessed whether this permit application complies with the requirements of the Population Screening Act.

Like the 20-week anomaly scan, a first-trimester anomaly scan can detect congenital anomalies. Such defects cannot be treated, but early detection provides prospective parents more time for a follow-up diagnosis, and for decisions regarding termination of the pregnancy.

The Committee concludes that the preliminary first-trimester scan conducted by the experienced trainer is useful, and that it poses little or no risk to the pregnant woman or her foetus. However, when imaging during this preliminary scan was in any way inadequate, the pregnant women should not participate in the skills training course. This will minimise any risk of a congenital anomaly being detected during the skills training course. The Committee concludes that the participant information sheet and consent form does not comply with the requirements, thus making it impossible for pregnant women to make informed choices

about undergoing a preliminary first-trimester scan.

The Committee advises the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport to grant the permit, subject to the following conditions:

- Any pregnant women in whom imaging during the preliminary first-trimester scan was in any way inadequate may not participate in the skills training course.
- The participants information sheet and consent form must be modified, to ensure that it is complete and that its various sections are effectively coordinated.



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