

A woman's pathway through a medical abortion (MA) from a pharmacy

Each woman's pathway will be influenced by her individual preferences and by government commitments to uphold her rights. Politics, culture and socio-economics will all have a bearing.

And what we can do

1 She discovers she's pregnant

- Often the first delay in abortion care-seeking
- Decision is made: to keep the pregnancy, end the pregnancy or plan for adoption

Free pregnancy testing with links to comprehensive reproductive health services

2 Seeks help

- Decision-making influenced by advice from friends/family, affordability, proximity, availability, confidentiality
- Care-seeking often informed by limited knowledge of legal status, methods, providers and safety

- Mass media
- Community health workers
- Internet
- Community campaigns
- Women's groups
- Male education
- Hotlines

3 Visits the pharmacy

- She may not go to the pharmacy herself
- Does the pharmacy look reputable?
- Is the pharmacy worker trained and approachable?

- External branding to indicate quality assurance
- Accompaniment program
- Pharmacy training

Information

- Some women will be turned away without information or drugs
- She may be more likely to get an effective medication if she states the name of a specific drug

- Pharmacy detailing
- Referral mechanisms and incentives
- Pharmacy training

Products

- MA products might not be available in pharmacies, particularly mifepristone
- Provision of ineffective medications for abortion is common in some countries
- Incorrect amounts of the drugs are commonly offered due to knowledge and cost barriers
- Drugs are often sold without packaging, and so lack information

- Distribution of safe products
- Registration of mifepristone and misoprostol
- Quality assurance mechanisms for products
- Pricing interventions
- Pill bags with informational instructions
- Pictorial instructions
- Hotline number on the packaging
- SMS photos of correct drugs

Delays

May be linked to fear, denial, lack of funds

- Smart pricing mechanisms
- Stigma reduction programs
- Service waivers

Prior abortion attempts

She may make multiple attempts using different methods and providers

- Referral mechanisms and incentives
- Post-abortion care

4 Prepares to take the drugs

- What does she remember of what the pharmacist said?
- If someone else went on her behalf, what do they convey?
- Does she need to seek additional advice?

- 24-hour hotlines
- Accompaniment program
- Tablet holder to ensure right dosage

5 Administers the drugs

Drugs are taken in a variety of ways, with a wide range of, often incorrect, doses and repeat doses

- Mobile apps and mHealth
- Pictorial instructions
- Hotlines

6 Experiencing the abortion

- The experience will differ from woman to woman
- Some will experience a range of side effects
- Some women plan to go to a clinic once bleeding starts, some seek help prematurely, others delay seeking help

- Mobile apps and mHealth
- Hotlines
- Pain relief/sanitary pad provision

Complications

- If taking wrong doses or products, she may become extremely unwell
- She may seek post-abortion care, but may not receive appropriate advice
- She may return to the same pharmacy for more pills or more expensive pills if the abortion is incomplete

- Pictorial guidance on when to seek help in case of complications
- Referral links to post-abortion care
- Hotlines

8 After effects and return of fertility

- She may have ongoing symptoms and/or morbidity
- She may still have unmet need for contraception as family planning counselling is rarely offered in pharmacies

- mHealth for information about contraception
- MA product bundled with contraceptive product or referral slip

9 Shares her experiences

- Abortion methods are often replicated based on word of mouth – what advice will she give others in future?
- If she has left over pills, will she sell them on to recover costs?

Forums to discuss contraception and women's health

Want to know more?

- www.mariestopes.org
- www.ipas.org
- Please contact: katy.footman@mariestopes.org

7 Assessing completion

- Women can often accurately self-assess completion of MA, from the passage of blood clots
- She can also use a pregnancy test to assess completion

- Self-assessment checklists
- Semi-quantitative pregnancy tests