

Table 4

Results of studies of acceptability of medical abortion

First author and year	Type of medical abortion	No. and assignment of women	Timing of interviews	Attitudes before treatment ^a	Positive aspects after treatment ^a	Negative aspects after treatment ^a	Percentage willing to use method again	Ref. no.
Rosen (1979)	Vaginal prostaglandin	30 (R)	Before first appointment with doctor; 2 weeks after treatment, before discharge; 2 weeks after treatment	More favourable towards medical abortion than surgical abortion	Procedure less distressing and less traumatic than expected	Higher scores on pain and bleeding than surgical cases	NA	235
Rosen (1984)	Vaginal prostaglandin (in hospital) Vaginal prostaglandin (at home)	18 (R) 17 (R)	Before first appointment with doctor; 2 weeks after abortion, before follow-up examination	Preferred by 11% of sample Preferred by 68% of sample because of greater comfort and privacy compared with treatment in hospital, and possibility of support from partner/friend	Generally met positive expectations	Pain and bleeding led some to prefer surgical methods	16% 69%	44
				Medical abortion considered more natural than surgical abortion, which was preferred by 16% of sample				

Table 4

Continued

First author and year	Type of medical abortion	No. and assignment of women	Timing of interviews	Attitudes before treatment ^a	Positive aspects after treatment ^a	Negative aspects after treatment ^a	Percentage willing to use method again	Ref. no.
Hill (1990)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	100 (C/L)	7, 14 and 28 days after treatment	Acceptance of method by 64% of women for whom an early abortion by vacuum aspiration under general anaesthesia had been planned	Complete abortion occurred in 95% of women	Analgesia required after prostaglandin treatment in over 50% of sample	88%	236
Tang (1991)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	23 (C/S)	Before treatment; 8, 15 and 43 days after treatment	<p><i>Acceptors:</i>^b Less traumatic than surgical method More natural than surgical method Recommended by doctor Fear of surgery</p> <p><i>Refusers:</i>^c Less effective than surgical method Many visits required Surgical method quicker Desire to have abortion quickly</p>	<p><i>Day 8:</i> Sense of relief More natural than surgical method Safe method Convenient method</p>	<p><i>Day 8:</i> Suspected incomplete abortion Sadness Inconvenient visits</p> <p><i>Day 43:</i> Prolonged bleeding</p>	91% (96% would recommend to a friend)	237

Urquhart (1991)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	54 (C/L)	2 days before treatment; 7 days and 4 weeks after treatment	NA	Greater sense of awareness than with surgical method Sense of being more in control Relief at avoiding general anaesthesia Less invasive than surgical method	Less satisfaction among younger women, nulliparous women, those who required analgesia, and those who saw products of conception	75%	238
Legarth (1991)	Mifepristone	25 (R)	1 week after treatment	NA	Method rated as acceptable by women classified as uncomplicated cases	Mild side- effects reported in 58% of uncomplicated cases and in all women classified as complicated cases	100% among those who had had a previous abortion	239

Table 4
Continued

First author and year	Type of medical abortion	No. and assignment of women	Timing of interviews	Attitudes before treatment ^a	Positive aspects after treatment ^a	Negative aspects after treatment ^a	Percentage willing to use method again	Ref. no.
Bachelot (1992)	Mifepristone + intramuscular prostaglandin	251 (C/U)	On day of treatment; before selection of method; 2 weeks after treatment	<p><i>Acceptors:</i></p> <p>Less traumatic than surgical abortion</p> <p>Safer</p> <p>Lower risk for future pregnancy</p> <p>Lower risk of failure</p> <p>More natural than surgical abortion</p> <p>Less invasive than surgical abortion</p> <p>Novel method</p> <p>Desire to verify that expulsion had occurred</p> <p><i>Refusers:</i></p> <p>Less traumatic than medical abortion</p> <p>Lower risk of failure</p> <p>Safer</p> <p>Lower risk for future pregnancy</p>	<p>A high proportion (63%) of women wanted to see what had been expelled</p> <p>Majority (88%) of women satisfied with method</p>	<p>Dissatisfaction (more common in women with complications or those who failed to abort)</p> <p>Need for rest after the abortion</p> <p>Method not as quick and easy as expected in some cases</p>	-	240

Grimes (1992)	Mifepristone	8 (C/L)	4 weeks after treatment	Belief in efficacy of medical method Preference for medical method	Greater sense of privacy than with surgical method Less invasive than surgical method	Mild side-effects (pain and nausea) experienced by some women (also reported in placebo group)	241
Thong (1992)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin Mifepristone + oral prostaglandin	94 (NA) 86 (NA)	At time of discharge, after prostaglandin treatment (in either a sitting-room or a gynaecological ward)	NA	Majority expressed a preference for prostaglandin treatment in the sitting-room Less analgesia required in women given oral prostaglandin than in those given vaginal prostaglandin Nearly all women (99%) satisfied with method used	Women treated with vaginal prostaglandin reported more pain and required more analgesia than those given oral prostaglandin	242
Holmgren (1992)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	45 (C/S)	2 weeks after treatment	NA	Sense of relief about avoiding surgery Desire to verify that expulsion had occurred	Heavy bleeding Pain	243

Table 4

Continued

First author and year	Type of medical abortion	No. and assignment of women	Timing of interviews	Attitudes before treatment ^a	Positive aspects after treatment ^a	Negative aspects after treatment ^a	Percentage willing to use method again	Ref. no.
Henshaw (1993)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	73 (C/S) 99 (R)	Before treatment; 2 weeks after treatment	<p>Acceptors:</p> <p>Fear of surgery</p> <p>Fear of general anaesthesia</p> <p>More natural than surgical abortion</p> <p>Less invasive than surgical method</p> <p>Refusers:</p> <p>Too slow</p> <p>Side-effects</p> <p>Additional visits required</p> <p>Preference for general anaesthesia</p>	Highly acceptable	Pain	95% 74%	244

Tang (1993)	Mifepristone + vaginal prostaglandin	99 (C/S)	Before treatment; 8, 15 and 43 days after treatment	<p><i>Acceptors:</i> Fear of surgery Convenient for work Less traumatic than surgical abortion Fear of general anaesthesia</p> <p><i>Refusers:</i> Surgical abortion quicker Too many visits Side-effects</p>	<p><i>Day 8:</i> Sense of relief Convenient Avoidance of surgery</p> <p><i>Day 43:</i> Time-consuming Prolonged bleeding</p>	85%	245
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R: random assignment; C/S: personal choice between methods in study; C/U: study of one method only; C/L: personal choice between usual clinical services; NA: not available.

^a In order of frequency of occurrence.

^b A total of 63 reasons for choosing medical abortion were given.

^c A total of 50 reasons for refusing medical abortion were given.

8.3.1 ***Acceptability of medical abortion compared with vacuum aspiration***

Nine studies have compared the acceptability of early medical abortion with abortion by vacuum aspiration, including one from Denmark, one from France, two from Hong Kong, two from Scotland and three from Sweden.

Two studies by Rosen et al. used similar designs and methods to assess the acceptability of medical abortion methods in Sweden (44, 235, 246). These studies predated the availability of mifepristone, and medical abortion involved the use of vaginal meteneprost pessaries which were given at 3-hour intervals. The women were randomly allocated to either the medical or surgical procedure. Of those allocated to the medical method, 81% would have chosen it and, 2 weeks after the abortion, 79% considered that this method had proved acceptable. In contrast, only 39% of those allocated to vacuum aspiration would have chosen this method but, 2 weeks after the abortion, 69% considered that it had been acceptable (246).

In England, Hill et al. studied the attitudes of 100 women using mifepristone plus a vaginal gemeprost pessary, but did not assess attitudes to vacuum aspiration (236). Women for whom an early first-trimester abortion by vacuum aspiration under general anaesthesia had been planned were asked if they would be willing to have the abortion done medically; 64% accepted the medical method. After the abortion 88% of those who had accepted the medical method said that they would be willing to have the same method again.

In Hong Kong, Tang et al. allowed women to choose their method of abortion (237, 245). In the second (and larger) study, 69% selected medical abortion and 31% vacuum aspiration. Those who chose the medical method were motivated by fear of surgery and a feeling that medical abortion would be safer; these women tended to be young (median age = 29 years), single and nulliparous. Reasons for selecting vacuum aspiration were that it was considered quick and convenient and because of concern about possible risks associated with the use of medical agents; these women tended to be older (median age = 33 years), married and to have children. Of the women who underwent medical abortion, 85% would use this method again.

In Aberdeen, Scotland, Urquhart & Templeton studied women having early medical abortion who had chosen to take part in a clinical study and compared them with a group having vacuum aspiration under general anaesthesia in the routine service (238). The focus of the study was the assessment of anxiety and depression and these were both reduced markedly by either method of abortion. When asked which method they would choose if a future abortion was

needed, 75% of those who had a medical abortion and 94% of those who had a surgical abortion would select the same method. When medical abortion was preferred it was because of awareness of what was happening, of feeling more in control, it was more discreet and because general anaesthesia was avoided.

In a further study from Aberdeen, women were asked if they would be prepared to be allocated at random to either early medical abortion or vacuum aspiration under general anaesthesia; those who refused to be allocated at random were given the choice of method (244). Random allocation was accepted by 54% of women, and 20% and 26% chose medical abortion and vacuum aspiration, respectively. Women who chose medical abortion did so because of fear of surgery or of general anaesthesia and because it seemed more natural. Vacuum aspiration was chosen because the procedure was brief and there would be general anaesthesia, and because it entailed fewer visits to the hospital. In this study, 95% of those having medical abortion and 90% of those having surgical abortion would have been willing to have the same method again.

Holmgren interviewed three groups of women in Sweden about 2 weeks after they had had vacuum aspiration either early in the first trimester or late in the first trimester, or an early medical abortion (243). The abortion experience was viewed as positive by 88% (35/40), 72% (31/43) and 87% (39/45) of women in these groups, respectively, and 40% (18/45) of those having an early medical abortion were relieved not to have had a surgical procedure. Of the women who had a medical abortion, 80% would have the same method again.

In France, Bachelot et al. compared early medical abortion with vacuum aspiration in women receiving routine care in six clinics (240). The women had a choice of medical abortion or of vacuum aspiration under either local or general anaesthesia. Among women who expressed a preference, 66% preferred medical abortion, 18% vacuum aspiration with local anaesthesia, and 16% vacuum aspiration with general anaesthesia. Reasons for choosing medical abortion were that it was less invasive, that personal control would be retained, that seeing the pregnancy expelled would be reassuring, and that it was more natural than surgical abortion. Vacuum aspiration was preferred because it was quick and efficient and because there would be close medical involvement. The women who had vacuum aspiration under local anaesthesia tended to be better educated and to have higher incomes than the rest of the study group. General anaesthesia was selected more often by women who originated from Africa or South America. After the abortion, 12% of those who had a medical

abortion felt that it had not been as quick and easy as expected, whilst only 4% were dissatisfied after vacuum aspiration.

The above studies indicate that a significant proportion of women requiring abortion at up to 9 weeks of gestation are interested in medical methods and that over 50% of women will choose to have their abortion by this method. After a medical abortion, over 75% of women would have a future abortion by the same method, but satisfaction after vacuum aspiration tends to be higher, with over 90% of women being willing to repeat the method, and those that had been doubtful about vacuum aspiration beforehand tending to feel more positive about it afterwards. Young, single, nulliparous women tend to prefer medical methods whilst older, parous, married women tend to prefer vacuum aspiration. A possible factor influencing the preference of older, parous women is the shorter time period associated with vacuum aspiration and the fewer visits to the providing unit that are required. There is a fair degree of uniformity of opinion between these studies, but there is a need for comparable research in developing countries where health care resources are much more limited. There is also a need for research that compares the acceptability of medical methods and dilatation and evacuation in the second trimester.

8.3.2 *Acceptability of the environment in which medical abortion occurs*

The environment in which an abortion method is provided influences its acceptability. In the second study by Rosen et al. (44), the women allocated to the medical abortion group were asked if they would prefer to have the abortion in hospital or at home. A preference for treatment at home was expressed by 68% of women; these women felt that their privacy would be greater, that they would be more at ease and that they would be able to have the company of their partner or a friend. The study was too small to assess the safety and practicality of remaining at home during a prostaglandin-induced abortion, but those who remained at home received less analgesia by injection than those in hospital. It is unclear whether this was because they were less disturbed by their uterine contractions or because they felt diffident about telephoning for assistance.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, Thong et al. studied 180 women undergoing an early medical abortion at up to 63 days of amenorrhoea (242). The focus of the study was the assessment of the women's attitude towards the environment in which they received the prostaglandin component of early medical abortion. The women were allocated at random to a small gynaecological ward or a sitting-room when they returned to the hospital 2 days after taking mifepristone, for administration of the

prostaglandin. Afterwards 77% and 69% of those assigned to the sitting-room and the ward, respectively, considered that the sitting-room was preferable. One reason was that all the women in the sitting-room were sharing the same experience while the ward also contained women having other day-care gynaecological procedures. Some women in the sitting-room wanted to lie down and this was made possible. Almost half (46%) of the women would have preferred their partner or a friend to have stayed with them, and 24% would have preferred to have received the prostaglandin at home if this option had been available.

These studies suggest that a day unit that offers privacy, easy chairs, and beds for those who prefer to lie down, provides an acceptable environment for medical abortion. Many women obtain support from the presence of others going through the same experience. Many would prefer to be accompanied by someone they know well but this could lessen the privacy of other women having an abortion on that day. Having the abortion at home would increase privacy for all women and would also allow them a free choice of companion. Further studies are needed on the location of the provision of medical abortion, particularly with regard to the safety and resource requirements of having the abortion at home.

8.4 **Acceptability to providers**

Women can have a choice of abortion method only if a choice is made available by providers. The service arrangements and staff attitudes required for the provision of medical abortion are different from those necessary for surgical methods. Those accustomed to vacuum aspiration may see this method as easier, both from their own viewpoint and from their perception of what women want. However, as women become aware of the advantages of medical abortion, they begin to seek this from local providers who tend to respond with appropriate services. Also, health care professionals have a strong preference for early abortion and many prefer not to have to evacuate the uterus personally (247, 248). Early medical abortion allows medical staff to remain detached from the process of uterine evacuation. Furthermore, the assessment, counselling and direct supervision of women having medical abortion can be delegated to personnel who do not have surgical skills and who may welcome such responsibility. Women may be more inclined to provide such services than men (249). This has occurred in some centres in Great Britain where the provision of early medical abortion is by doctors whose principal role is to provide contraceptive services rather than by the gynaecologists who provide vacuum aspiration (250).

8.5 Conclusions

1. The available studies indicate that, when given the choice between a medical and a surgical procedure for early termination of pregnancy, many women opt for the medical method.
2. The majority of women, irrespective of whether they chose medical or surgical abortion, are satisfied with the method chosen.
3. Apprehension about surgery and general anaesthesia is an important determinant of the preference for a medical method.

8.6 Recommendations

1. Women should be given a choice between medical and surgical methods of abortion, when appropriate.
2. Research should be conducted to identify factors affecting the acceptability of different methods of abortion.
3. Appropriate research is needed to improve current protocols used in the medical induction of abortion and thus enhance their applicability and acceptability.
4. Research is needed to assess whether findings from research in developed countries on the acceptability of medical methods for termination of early pregnancy also apply to developing countries.
5. Research is also needed to compare the acceptability of medical methods and dilatation and evacuation for the termination of second-trimester pregnancies.
6. Further studies are required on the location of the provision of medical abortion in early pregnancy, particularly with regard to the safety and resource requirements of having the abortion at home.

9. Introducing medical abortion as a routine clinical service

9.1 Experience in France and Great Britain

Mifepristone in combination with prostaglandin is approved for routine clinical use in medical abortion up to 49 days of gestation in China and France and up to 63 days in Great Britain and Sweden. Approval was granted in France in September 1988. A training programme for health care personnel was organized and, within a year, medical abortion had been provided for 2115 women through 458 centres (251). French law already permitted abortion on request in the first trimester and it was possible to utilize the network of

government-authorized facilities that had been developed to provide abortion by vacuum aspiration. French women pay a standard fee at the time of the abortion but 80% of this is subsequently refunded by the national health insurance scheme (252). In 1991 it was estimated that 12.3% of all abortions were carried out using mifepristone plus prostaglandin.

The British government granted a licence permitting the use of mifepristone and gemeprost for abortions of up to 63 days of gestation in July 1991. Training seminars for doctors were provided by the manufacturer. Training and the organization of services took several months, with the result that only 109 procedures were performed up to the end of 1991 (17). However, 4000 abortions were performed in 1992 and in 1993 it was estimated that 6000 or just over 10% of all the abortions of up to 63 days of gestation were carried out by this method (T. Eaton, personal communication, 1994). In contrast to France, British law requires two doctors to certify that abortion is necessary to protect the woman's health (see page 7) and this delays the referral process. In England and Wales, only about 50% of abortions are provided free of charge by the National Health Service, the limiting factors being the attitudes of medical staff and competing priorities for gynaecological resources. As a result, many women are obliged to obtain an abortion from private clinics where they pay the full cost. The majority of abortions provided by the National Health Service are carried out by vacuum aspiration in routine gynaecological facilities. Medical abortion requires different arrangements and many services have been slow to adapt. The private clinics have found that medical abortion costs more than abortion by vacuum aspiration because of the price of the medication and the additional visits that are required. However, medical abortion is in demand in the National Health Service in those centres that have efficient arrangements for referral, sympathetic staff and special day-care facilities for the administration of the prostaglandin (250).

The above comparison shows how access to early medical abortion is influenced by abortion law, and by the organization and financing of its provision. Early medical abortion is more widely used in France than Great Britain because the abortion law is more "liberal", the services are well organized and accessible, and the cost is largely funded by the state.

9.2 Experience in developing countries

China is the only developing country in which extensive experience has been gained of early medical abortion. Mifepristone is produced in government factories and is used in combination with the

prostaglandin analogues vaginal carboprost and oral misoprostol. The service is supervised by the State Family Planning Commission. Early medical abortion is currently restricted to hospitals, and medical staff have to have a certificate which is gained only after specialized training. Careful records are kept and both the supply of the pharmaceuticals and the quality of care before, during and after the abortion are monitored at the national level. When experience has been gained and sufficiently trained staff are available, it is planned to provide early medical abortion through local clinics that already offer abortion by vacuum aspiration with back-up from local hospitals (B. Xiao, personal communication, 1994).

9.3 **Planning the provision of early medical abortion**

The introduction of any treatment that involves new medical skills and which needs to be easily accessible to the majority of the population requires careful planning. Some experience has been gained with the introduction of vacuum aspiration services, not only for abortion but also to deal with retained products of conception after miscarriage (253, 254). In this regard, a WHO task force has designed a three-stage process to guide the introduction of new methods of fertility control (see Fig. 7; 255).

9.3.1 **Assessing the feasibility of introducing services**

Is early access to abortion possible?

Women should be able to obtain abortion before 49 days or, at the most, 63 days of amenorrhoea. Such early access depends on the abortion law but it is also important that access is not restricted by regulations concerning the provision of abortion so that many women are beyond the gestation limit by the time their request has been approved.

Do community attitudes support the provision of medical abortion?

Early medical abortion must be acceptable to the community as a whole. Women should be made aware of the side-effects (bleeding and pain) and the need for at least three visits to the providing centre.

Can an antiprogesterone and a prostaglandin analogue be made available?

The pharmaceuticals needed for early medical abortion must be licensed for routine clinical use. If this is not the case, it may be possible to organize a clinical trial in which the antiprogesterone–prostaglandin combination is used under local circumstances in order to demonstrate its suitability so that approval can be obtained for general use. A secure distribution system is necessary so that the pharmaceuticals

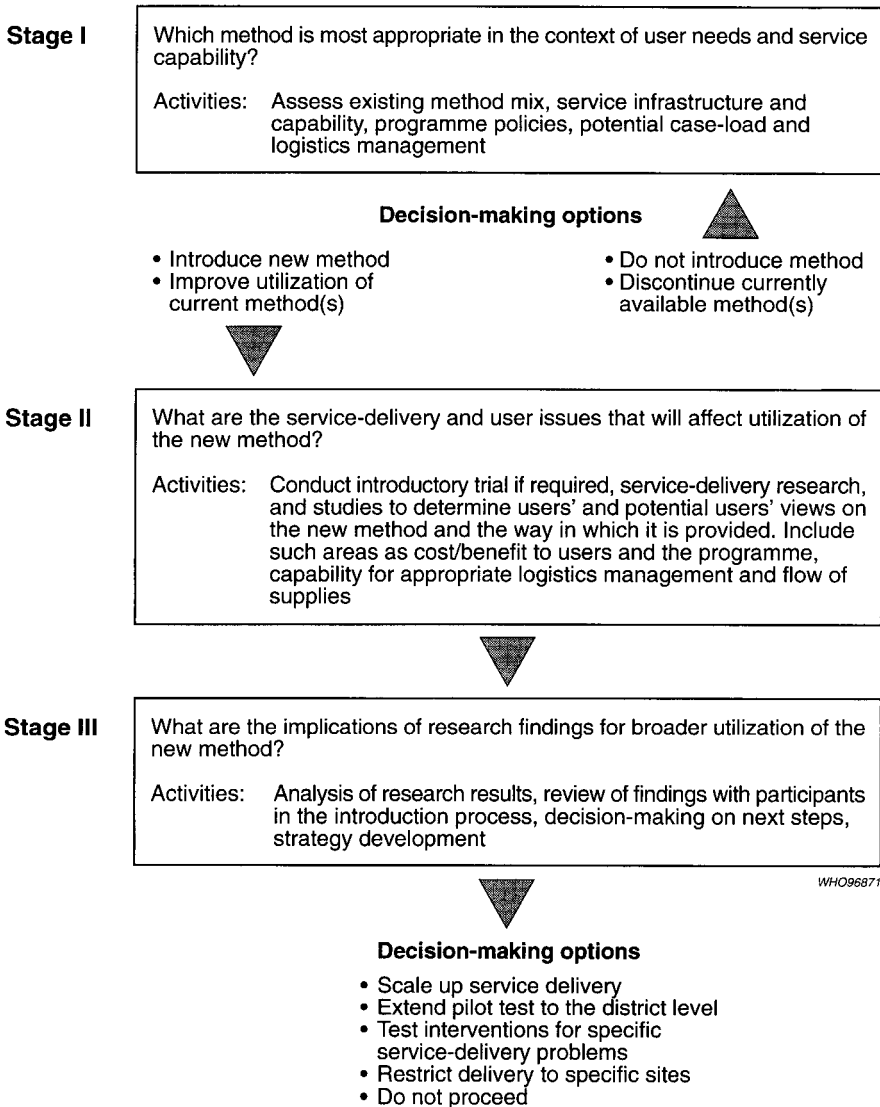
are available only to the trained health care professionals who provide the service.

Can sufficient resources be provided?

The health care services must have adequate resources to provide early medical abortion safely and on a scale that benefits the

Figure 7

A three-stage framework for decision-making on the introduction of fertility regulation^a



^a Source: reference 255. Used by permission.

population as a whole. There must also be a sufficient number of health care professionals who are prepared to run such a service. Consideration must be given to the probability that the cost of the new service would be offset by savings resulting from the need to treat fewer women with complications of unsafe abortion.

Could existing health care facilities incorporate early medical abortion?

Provision is less costly if early medical abortion is provided through local clinics that already provide maternal and child health care and family planning. The management of complications requires access to and close cooperation with the local gynaecological services. This includes the provision of blood transfusion.

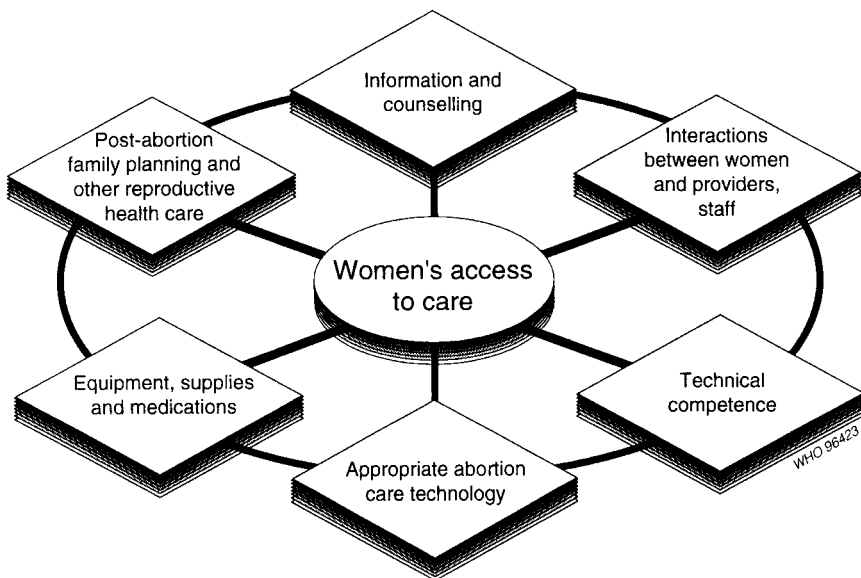
9.3.2 Factors to be considered

If the introduction of early medical abortion is considered to be feasible, the service must be planned so that women receive safe, competent and sympathetic care (see Fig. 8).

Personnel

Early medical abortion has been successfully provided by registered medical practitioners (who need not be gynaecologists), trained

Figure 8
Quality of care framework for abortion care^a



^a Source: reference 256. Used by permission.

nurses and supervised paramedical staff. The qualifications of the staff to be employed will depend on the laws regulating the provision of abortion and general health care services. Personnel with experience of providing contraceptives can be trained to provide medical abortion during courses lasting only a few days. There are advantages in recruiting staff for an early medical abortion service from family planning services and employing them part-time in both services.

Training should focus on the principles of early medical abortion but should also cover the detection of health problems, such as anaemia and genital tract infection, the early diagnosis of pregnancy (including the signs and symptoms of ectopic pregnancy), the determination of gestation, the assessment of the completeness of the abortion, and the management of incomplete abortion and excessive bleeding. Counsellors must be able to help women understand what is involved in the medical abortion process. Those with counselling skills can acquire the information they need in a short course and then benefit from observing experienced counsellors at work for a week or so before providing such a service themselves.

Women requesting an abortion must be treated with respect. These aspects of a service do not happen automatically but are the result of standards set by managers and maintained by the example of all staff, particularly those who are more senior. The needs and well-being of the women should be the focus of the service. The organization of the service and the attitudes of staff should make clear that confidentiality is a priority. Women should be assured that they have the right and the ability to control their lives and that they will be given the information they need and help with the decision they make.

Provision must be made for the management of incomplete abortion by staff trained in vacuum aspiration (or curettage) who can provide this service on site or in a nearby gynaecological facility. The latter is also necessary for the safe management of women who need blood transfusion or are suspected of having an ectopic pregnancy.

Standards of care must be maintained by the regular monitoring of conformity by staff to the standard protocols and monitoring of the frequency of complications.

Facilities

The centres that provide early medical abortion must be within reasonable travelling time of the women's homes, since they will need to make at least three visits. A private area, an examination couch and a lavatory are basic requirements for the assessment visit. The administration of the prostaglandin also requires a private area where women

can sit or lie down as they wish, and have access to a separate lavatory equipped with an appropriate container for collecting the products of conception. It should be possible to estimate the woman's haemoglobin concentration and determine her blood group either on site or at a local laboratory. Reliable and separate arrangements must be made for the disposal of the products of conception. Drugs must be stored securely and refrigeration may be necessary, depending on the prostaglandin analogue in use. A telephone is necessary to provide a link with the local hospital that is providing back-up services. It should be possible to provide the women having prostaglandin treatment with drinks and light refreshments.

Accessibility of services

As already mentioned, the services that provide early medical abortion must be located within a reasonable distance of women's homes. However, this requirement may conflict with the need for confidentiality. Confidentiality is increased if abortion services are integrated with other services concerned with maternal and child health and family planning, but it should be possible for women to obtain an abortion at a more distant centre if they are concerned about confidentiality.

Another important aspect of accessibility is that the services should be able to meet the local case-load. The provision should not be rationed by having a waiting-list for assessment or for the abortion itself.

Supplies and equipment

The success of an early medical abortion service depends on a well organized system of distribution that ensures that every providing centre always has an adequate stock of the abortion-inducing agents and other pharmaceuticals that are necessary for the safety and well-being of the women. The drugs available should include not only the antiprogestogen and the prostaglandin analogue but also ergometrine, oxytocin, analgesics, an antiemetic, an injectable local anaesthetic agent, antibiotics, and drugs for rare cardiovascular emergencies such as epinephrine and an injectable antihistamine. A supply of Rhesus (D) human immune globulin is required for women who are Rhesus-negative. Intravenous infusion equipment should be available for emergency use, together with supplies of sterile physiological saline and a gelatin-based blood substitute. Blood transfusion should be possible at the local back-up unit.

The supply of essential equipment should also be adequate and reliable. This includes sterile specula for inspecting the cervix and sterile syringes and needles. Equipment for evacuating retained products of conception is necessary. An electric suction pump is not essential as

the vacuum created with a syringe is adequate in the gestation range at which early medical abortion is possible. Sharp curettage is an inferior alternative to vacuum aspiration. All the instruments must be sterile.

Information and counselling

Information and counselling are fundamental aspects of health care. Women should be provided with complete and accurate information about the methods of abortion that are available so that they can make a fully informed choice. After selecting a method, they should be given all the necessary details, including the number of visits that will be necessary, the degree of discomfort, pain and bleeding they are likely to experience during and after the abortion process, and how to recognize the signs that mean they need to seek professional help. They should also be given clear instructions as to how such help can be obtained.

The provision of information must be based on agreed protocols. The development of such protocols is time-consuming but must be accomplished before staff are trained and a medical abortion service is inaugurated. Provision must be made for the training of all new staff and for periodic refresher courses.

Staff training can be assisted by the production of leaflets and videotapes. Organized training and agreed protocols are particularly important for the counsellors who help the women with their initial decision to have an abortion, but all staff in contact with the women at any point in the abortion process must be able to provide consistent and accurate information when requested. With early medical abortion, women must be informed about the upper gestation limit, the need to return for the administration of the prostaglandin, and the importance of a follow-up visit to check that the treatment has been successful.

Post-abortion family planning

An abortion service should have close links with family planning services. All women requesting an abortion should be asked about their experience of contraception and offered help in establishing a method they would find acceptable once the pregnancy is over. Before an abortion most women are too preoccupied with their distress about the unwanted pregnancy and their fear of the abortion procedure to be able to benefit from counselling about contraception. However, counselling should be available when they return for their follow-up visit, together with appropriate supplies of contraceptive agents and devices.

9.4 Conclusions

1. Experience in France and Great Britain shows that early medical abortion can be provided in developed countries through adaptation of existing abortion services.
2. Experience in China suggests that early medical abortion with the mifepristone–prostaglandin combination is potentially usable in other developing countries where abortion is not prohibited by law.
3. The introduction of medical abortion should be planned to fit in with existing abortion services and should have close links with the routine gynaecological services. The resulting service should be monitored closely. The information gained will allow modification of the newly introduced service and guide other countries in planning their provision of early medical abortion.

9.5 Recommendations

1. Services should provide women with complete and accurate information on the features of medical and surgical abortions so that they can make a fully informed choice.
2. Research is needed to determine the most effective way to provide early medical abortion.
3. With regard to the introduction of early medical abortion with antiprogestogen plus prostaglandin, information is required on:
 - the effects on the existing abortion services;
 - the changes necessary in training providers;
 - the best approach to ensuring optimal care for clients;
 - cost issues;
 - the organization of back-up services.
4. The problems of introducing early medical abortion services vary with national abortion laws, existing local health care services and cultural attitudes to induced abortion. Consequently, while research from China, France and Great Britain can provide general guidance, other countries will need to organize pilot studies on the introduction of this new technique, before deciding how it will be provided at the national level.
5. Access to early medical abortion with the antiprogestogen–prostaglandin combination will be enhanced if the health care system functions effectively and makes it possible for women to obtain abortion early in pregnancy.

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