TASK SHIFTING IN THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL ABORTION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Unsafe abortion is one of the main causes of maternal mortality. Each year, approximately 21.6 million women worldwide still undergo an unsafe abortion resulting in an estimated 47000 deaths. Currently 39% of the population lives in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws. However, also in countries where abortion is legal, obstructive administrative procedures and insufficient services or providers reduce access to safe abortion services. Medical abortion is one of the safest medical procedures, with minimal morbidity and a negligible risk of death. Task shifting may result in increased access to and availability of medical abortion services while maintaining the same quality of care. While task shifting can be done to other healthcare professionals, it can also be done to women themselves with the use of telemedicine.

Material, methods and results: Study 1 describes the outcome of medical abortions provided via Women on Web, a telemedical abortion service for women with an unwanted pregnancy up to 9 weeks living in countries without safe abortion care. This retrospective study analyzed interactive web-based questionnaires, follow-up forms, emails, and telephone calls from 484 women who received a medical abortion at their home addresses. Sixteen of the 265 (6.0%) women who provided follow-up information reported that they did not use the medication. Of the remaining 249 women who did the medical abortion at home, 13.6% reported having a surgical intervention afterwards and 1.6% reported a continuing pregnancy. After the follow up rate increased from 54.8% to 77.6% of the cases, 12.6% of the women reported they did not take the medication and only 6.8% of the women having the medical abortion at home underwent a surgical intervention afterwards.

Study 2 explored the factors that influence the surgical intervention rate after home medical abortion provided through Women on Web to women with a pregnancy up to 9 weeks. Of the 2323 women who did the medical abortion, 289 (12.4%) received a surgical intervention. High rates were found in Eastern Europe (14.8%), Latin America (14.4%) and Asia/Oceania (11.0%) and low rates in Western Europe (5.8%), the Middle East (4.7%) and Africa (6.1%);
p=0.000). More interventions were carried out when women had a longer gestational age (p=0.000). Women without a surgical intervention reported satisfaction with the treatment more frequently (p=0.000).

**Study 3** evaluated the need for and outcome of self-administered medical abortion in Brazil, provided through telemedicine. Of the 370 women used the medicines, 307 women provided follow-up information about the outcome of the medical abortion. Of this group, 207 (67.4%) of the women were up to 9 weeks pregnant, 71 (23.1%) were 10, 11 or 12 weeks pregnant, and 29 (9.5%) of the women were at least 13 weeks pregnant. There was a significant difference in surgical intervention rates after the medical abortion at the different gestations (19.3% at <9 weeks, 15.5% at 10-12 weeks and 44.8% at >13 weeks, p=0.06). However, 42.2% of the women who had received a surgical intervention afterwards did not have any symptoms of a complication.

**Study 4** assessed the efficacy, safety and acceptability of midlevel provision of medical abortion in a clinical high resource setting. In total 1180 women eligible for inclusion were recruited and randomized to either a nurse midwife or a gynecologist for counseling, examination including ultrasound and treatment. The provision of medical abortion by midlevel providers proved to be as effective and safe as the medical abortion provided by physicians. The risk difference for efficacy was 1.6%, which falls within the 5% margin that was set for equivalence (p=0.027). Women were significantly more likely to prefer a midwife for the consultation (p<0.001).

**Conclusion:** The research shows that medical abortion can be safely and effectively provided by midlevel health care providers as well as women themselves through telemedicine. The acceptability and outcome of medical abortion up to 9 weeks of pregnancy is similar when provided by doctors, nurse midwives or administered by women themselves via telemedicine. Surgical intervention rates after the medical abortion provided via telemedicine reflect local medical practices. The risk of surgical intervention and ongoing pregnancy after home medical abortion only tends to increase after 12 weeks of pregnancy.
LIST OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS


IV. Kopp Kallner H, Gomperts R, Salomonsson E, Johansson M, Marions L, Gemzell Danielsson K. The efficacy, safety, and acceptability of medical abortion provided by midlevel providers or physicians in a high resource setting- a randomized controlled equivalence trial (submitted for publication).
## CONTENTS

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
  1.1 Abortion worldwide ................................................................................................. 1  
      1.1.1 Human right to safe Abortion care .............................................................. 2  
  1.2 Barriers to Access safe abortion services ................................................................. 3  
      1.2.1 Countries where abortion is legal ................................................................. 3  
      1.2.2 Logistical, financial, administrative, procedural and geographical barriers to access abortion ................................................................. 4  
      1.2.3 Gestational limits ............................................................................................. 7  
      1.2.4 Conscientious objection .................................................................................. 7  
      1.2.5 Restrictive abortion laws ................................................................................. 8  
      1.2.6 Religious views on abortion ............................................................................ 10  
      1.2.7 Health effects of restricted abortion access .................................................... 11  
  1.3 Medical abortion: A revolution ................................................................................. 13  
      1.3.1 Background ...................................................................................................... 13  
      1.3.2 Mifepristone .................................................................................................... 15  
      1.3.3 Misoprostol ..................................................................................................... 16  
      1.3.4 Different protocols for different gestational periods ....................................... 17  
      1.3.5 The comparison of medical abortion to surgical abortion ............................. 18  
      1.3.6 Follow up ........................................................................................................ 18  
      1.3.7 Possible complications and treatment ............................................................. 19  
      1.3.8 The role of Midlevel Healthcare providers .................................................... 20
1.3.9 The role of women themselves ............................................ 21
1.3.10 The promise of telemedicine .............................................. 23

2 Aims of the study ........................................................................ 26
3 Material and Methods ................................................................. 27

3.1 Study subjects .......................................................................... 27

3.1.1 Study 1: Outcome and acceptability of medical abortion at home provided via telemedicine ..................................................... 27
3.1.2 Study 2: Factors influencing the outcome of medical abortion at home provided via telemedicine ..................................................... 27
3.1.3 Study 3: Medical abortion provided to women living in Brazil via telemedicine. ................................................................. 27
3.1.4 Study 4: Midlevel provision of medical abortion. ............... 27
3.1.5 Study 5: Outcome of home medical abortions after 12 weeks of gestation with different misoprostol regiments ...................... 28

3.2 Evaluated parameters ................................................................. 28

3.2.1 Study 1, 2, 3 and 5. ................................................................. 28
3.2.2 Study 1: Outcome and acceptability of home medical abortion provided via telemedicine ................................................................. 29
3.2.3 Study 2: Factors influencing the outcome of home medical abortion provided via telemedicine ................................................................. 29
3.2.4 Study 3: Medical abortion provided to women living in Brazil via telemedicine. ................................................................. 30
3.2.5 Study 4: Midlevel provision of medical abortion. ............... 31
3.2.6 Study 5: Outcome of home medical abortions after 12 weeks gestation with different misoprostol regiments ...................... 31
3.3 Study treatment

3.3.1 Study 1, 2

3.3.2 Study 3

3.3.3 Study 4

3.3.4 Study 5

3.4 Data analyses and Statistics

3.4.1 Study 1: Outcome and acceptability of home medical abortion provided via telemedicine

3.4.2 Study 2: Factors influencing the outcome of home medical abortion provided via telemedicine

3.4.3 Study 3: Medical abortion provided to women living in Brazil via telemedicine

3.4.4 Study 4: Midlevel provision of medical abortion

3.4.5 Study 5: Outcome of home medical abortions after 12 weeks gestation with different misoprostol regimens

3.5 Ethical consideration

4 Results

4.1 Results study 1, 2, 3 and 5: Provision of medical abortion through telemedice

4.1.1 Demographic characteristics of the women using the telemedical service

4.1.2 Gestational age up to 9 weeks

4.1.3 Gestational age of more than 9 weeks

4.1.4 Complaints and symptoms of a possible complication
4.1.5 Factors influencing surgical intervention rate................. 41
4.1.6 Ongoing pregnancy rates........................................ 43
4.1.7 Acceptability......................................................... 44

4.2 Study 4: Midwife provision of medical abortion............... 46

5 Conflict of interest .................................................... 47
6 Discussion ................................................................. 48
7 Acknowledgements...................................................... 56
8 References .................................................................... 58
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;C</td>
<td>Dilatation and (sharp) Curettage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;E</td>
<td>Dilatation and Evaculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Emergency Contraceptives</td>
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<tr>
<td>EUR</td>
<td>Euro</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGO</td>
<td>The International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCG</td>
<td>Human Chorionic Gonadotropin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>WHO</td>
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