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

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
- Hotline number on the packaging
- SMS photos of correct drugs

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

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

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
- Pictorial instructions
- Referral slip

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

Assessing completion
- Self-assessment checklists
- Semi-quantitative pregnancy tests
- Counselling is rarely offered in pharmacies
- Assessment of medical abortion

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?

Want to know more?
- www.mariestopes.org
- Please contact: katy.footman@mariestopes.org

And what we can do

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.

1. Free pregnancy testing with links to comprehensive reproductive health services
2. Decision-making influenced by advice from family/friends, affordability, proximity, availability, confidentiality
3. Care-seeking often informed by limited knowledge of legal status, methods, providers and safety
4. Information
5. Products
6. Experiencing the abortion
7. Assessing completion
8. After effects and return of fertility
9. Shares her experiences

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