Echo Advance

Improving Access to Abortion Services in Ontario
Recommendations for Education Programs, Regulatory and Accrediting Bodies

What needs to happen?
Abortion services in Ontario must be accessible, safe, appropriate, timely, and non-judgmental within an integrated and sustainable reproductive health system. Actions need to focus on the ability of education and regulatory bodies to support access to high-quality abortion services in Ontario.

Where we are
Medical abortion¹ (when medications are used to end pregnancy) is not uniformly available in Ontario.
Abortion is not included in the core content of medical and nursing schools’ curricula, which limits the number of providers who can offer this safe and common procedure.

Where we want to be
Safe medical abortions are a component of primary care (with surgical back-up available) for all women in Ontario.
Abortion, abortion counselling, and sexual and reproductive health topics are part of the core curricula of medical and nursing education programs, including medical ethics. Practical training is provided to medical students and primary care practitioners.

Background: A cross-provincial Abortion Expert Panel was formed to develop recommendations on access to abortion in Ontario based on their own areas of expertise, through key stakeholder consultation, and the findings of an Ontario-based study¹ by Dr. L. Ferris through the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences. The research included a statistical examination of the provision of, and access to, non-emergent abortion services in the province; an examination of Family Physician/General Practitioners practice patterns and medical curriculum; and complications associated with non-emergent abortions¹. Stakeholders, including health care providers, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), education and regulatory bodies, and women themselves¹ have been identified to support the recommendations made by Echo’s Abortion Expert Panel.

Key Recommendations
Education, regulatory and accrediting bodies play a key role in supporting access to high-quality medical and surgical abortion services by incorporating necessary skills and knowledge into curricula and training programs, and ensuring health care providers know and abide by ethical and legal obligations. Regulatory bodies and education programs should:

¹ For more information regarding recommendations for other stakeholders, please see Echo’s series of Echo Advances related to access to abortion at www.echo-ontario.ca
Ensure abortion, abortion counselling, and sexual and reproductive health-related medical ethics are part of the core content of sexual and reproductive health curricula in medical and nursing schools and midwifery programs.

Curriculum and training programs should include:
- curriculum created by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada for obstetricians and gynaecologists (Abortion/Pregnancy Options);
- second trimester abortion training in obstetrics and gynaecology residency training;
- the adoption of the Kenneth J. Ryan Residency Training Program (a privately funded initiative that strives to integrate and enhance family planning training for obstetrics and gynaecology residents in the US and Canada); and,
- a 3rd year residency program in Family Medicine for Women’s Care which includes comprehensive abortion training.

Accreditation bodies should require:
- mandatory sexual and reproductive health curriculum in health care providers’ education programs, including associated elements of medical ethics through use of case studies.

Support the development of delegation of authority mechanisms and/or medical directives to enable nurses, nurse practitioners and physician assistants to play a role in the provision of medical abortion with appropriate back-up.

Regulatory colleges should increase the understanding of the ethical and legal obligations to the patient including the obligation to:
- protect confidentiality, provide information on options and risks, facilitate ongoing discussion regarding access to care, provide treatment in emergency situations, provide services in a respectful non-judgmental manner, and refer women to a willing provider if the physician objects on grounds of conscience, or is unskilled in the therapy required.

For more information, please contact Echo at 416.597.9687.

About Echo: Improving Women’s Health in Ontario

Echo: Improving Women’s Health in Ontario is an agency of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Our vision is improved health and well-being and reduced health inequities for Ontario women. For more information, please go to www.echo-ontario.ca.
References:


