REFERENCES

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Human Rights:


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Asia and Oceania Federation of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

POsITION STATEMENT ON PREVENTING UNSAFE ABORTIONS

The Tokyo Declaration

Adopted at the XXth ACOG, 21-25 September 2007, Tokyo, Japan

Background

More than 90 million abortions and 198,000 maternal abortion deaths were reported in the 23 ACOGOF member countries over a period of five years from 1995 to 2000.1,2

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an unsafe abortion as “a procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards, or both,” and notes that almost all abortion-related deaths are preventable and that when abortion is performed by qualified people using correct techniques in sanitary conditions, it is one of the safest medical procedures.2,3

In the year 2000, there were 10.5 million estimated unsafe abortions in Asia, which is more than half of the 19 million estimated unsafe abortions occurring globally.2,4

More than 50% of all maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion globally, occur in the region”, and such deaths and injuries disproportionately affect adolescents, poor women, and other socially at-risk groups of women.

To achieve The U.N. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 on maternal health the issue of unsafe abortion must be addressed.1,5

Numerous inter-governmental conferences and human rights conventions have acknowledged the rights of women to personal autonomy and to have access to health care, including the right to make personal decisions about whether and when to have children.1,2

Several U.N. conferences / documents including the ICPD 1994, and the ICPD +5 recognize women’s sexual and reproductive rights, have expressed commitments to address unsafe abortion, and have urged governments to ensure that women have access to high quality reproductive health services, including assuring that safe abortion services are available where legally permitted.1,2

The laws in all ACOGOF member countries permit abortion on some grounds, whether to save a woman’s life, to preserve her physical or mental health, in cases of rape and incest, for socio-economic reasons, or on request.1,2
To achieve these objectives, individual obstetrician/gynaecologists and Obstetrics and Gynaecology Societies are encouraged to take the following actions:

1. Establish a working group on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in each Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society or Federation with the participation of professionals from other disciplines in order to promote these rights and these recommendations.

2. Sponsor/Support comprehensive family planning programs for all women and men of reproductive age and dispel myths about temporary, permanent and emergency methods of contraception.

3. Take a leadership role in promoting official government interventions at all levels to promote access to safe abortion services for all legal indications and to control mortality caused by unsafe abortion.

4. Work with government health authorities to prepare and implement norms and guidelines that define the minimal level of quality in abortion care, the steps to assure sufficient public sector services, and the staffing and supplies needed for the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive rights, including access to safe abortion services for all legal indications. The use of WHO-endorsed technologies should be recommended and added to essential drugs and equipment lists.

5. Work with authorities governing medical curricula and schools responsible for training of professionals from health and related sciences, including midwife providers, to include content related to gender, sexual and reproductive rights, unwanted pregnancy and abortion, respect for diversity, and the importance of providers not imposing their own personal values on women seeking their care.

6. Promote continuing education of health professionals in the area of women’s reproductive and sexual rights in each country, and stimulate medical professionals to promote interdisciplinary debates on abortion care, including the fields of epidemiology, nursing, psychology, social work, and other disciplines which could have a bearing on the problem of unwanted pregnancy and abortion.

7. Serve as a source of information to the media in order to disseminate correct information related to women’s sexual and reproductive rights including abortion and the dangers of unsafe abortion.

8. Support efforts to prevent sex selective abortion by addressing the underlying causes that perpetuate discrimination against women and girls, including discriminatory laws, patriarchal structures, unfair dowry systems, etc. No physician should perform a sex selective abortion on social grounds.

9. Give special attention to adolescents seeking care for unwanted pregnancy or abortion.

10. Establish alliances with public and private institutions and with national and international NGOs concerned with these issues, including women’s groups in order to strengthen mutual efforts.

11. Study, analyze and understand national laws and policies in order to encourage provision of abortion services to the fullest extent permissible.

12. Advocate for laws which recognize the rights of women to obtain a safe abortion.

13. Advise service providers to honor the code of professional ethics which safeguards confidentiality, whilst working within the laws of the country.

14. Question laws and regulations which require physicians to report women suspected of obtaining abortion services or require police presence in obstetric clinics and emergency services.