



November 14, 2023

ISSUE

Patients dispensed medication for medical management of a miscarriage and medical abortion face an increased risk of domestic violence and marginalization within their communities.

PURPOSE

Safe medical management of a miscarriage and abortion requires confidentiality.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government of Alberta protect women from domestic violence by:

- not recording the prescribing and dispensing of mifepristone and their brand name (currently Mifegymiso) medications on provincial health records (Netcare).
- not recording the clinical notes and human chorionic gonadotropin (bHCG) lab results on provincial health records for patients receiving abortion services at the request of the ordering healthcare provider.
- not recording the prescribing and dispensing of misoprostol on the provincial health record at the request of the provider.

RATIONALE

- Women who have taken these medications to manage a pregnancy loss (a safer and less costly management option than a procedural abortion for miscarriage) are often presumed to have intentionally terminated their pregnancy. However, women may be prescribed medication to medically manage either a miscarriage (spontaneous abortion) or a therapeutic abortion (intentional).
- Provincial health records are not confidential. There are many ways in which the private information on the provincial health record can be seen by others. Examples include:
 - Partners have access to the patient's phone app.
 - Pharmacy workers in small towns will see information pertaining to the patient who may be a neighbour or go to the same church.
 - Subsequent healthcare providers can see the records.
- The lack of confidentiality has:
 - resulted in domestic violence from the patient's partner;
 - led to some women experiencing harm to the relationship with their family practitioner;
 - led to threats of violence and harm toward abortion clinic staff;
 - caused women in Alberta to experience marginalization in their community due to the stigma surrounding these medications; and
 - resulted in harm to patients' relationships with other healthcare providers.
- There are occasions when a patient chooses a procedural abortion over a medical termination to avoid having the evidence of abortion on their provincial health record. This is more costly to the health system.
- Comprehensive abortion care includes confidentiality. The listing of mifepristone, mifegymiso and abortion related lab values on the patient's provincial health record comprises patient care. This lack of confidentiality can and does result in psychological and physical harm to patients.



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- Leaving mifepristone, mifegymiso, abortion clinical records and abortion related bhCG levels off of the provincial health records would not compromise subsequent care and would reduce harm to patients.

BACKGROUND

- It is estimated up to 26% of all pregnancies end in miscarriage (Dugas, 2022).
- In 2021/22, Alberta's domestic violence shelters (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2022):
 - received 65,390 calls seeking support; and
 - admitted 4,182 women and 3,373 children.
- Abortions can be procedural or medical with medication.
- When abortion medicines are dispensed, they are recorded on the Alberta provincial health record (Netcare).
- Mifepristone is only prescribed for miscarriage and therapeutic abortion care, while misoprostol can be prescribed for many indications other than abortion.
- Currently, the only abortion medication brand available in Alberta is Mifegymiso, which contains mifepristone and misoprostol.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- The cost of abortion care to Alberta Health:
 - for the Edmonton AHS Women's Health Options facility is:
 - \$1140 for a medical abortion.
 - \$1200-1700 for procedural abortions.
 - for a family practitioner providing medical abortion care:
 - \$53 for the initial visit with a family physician.
 - \$300-450 for the Mifegymiso medication.
- The estimated cost of domestic violence in Alberta is \$1.9 billion per year (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2022).

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REFERENCES

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