



HOTLINE TRAINING MANUAL

**How to Establish a Hotline to
Provide Women
with
Information about Safe Abortion**

**Women on Waves
www.womenonwaves.org**



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I. Why is a Hotline Needed?

Abortion is the most common medical intervention in the world. According to the World Health Organization, each year 42 million women choose to have an abortion for all sorts of private reasons. Yet many women do not have access to safe abortion services and are forced to risk their lives and health. Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality. This hotline gives information to women about safe abortion options to protect their lives and health. Telephone hotlines are especially valuable for countries where misoprostol is easily available.

Establishing a hotline also provides a platform to engage activists in direct assistance to women and to raise awareness about the need to challenge unjust abortion laws and regulations. Hotlines can serve women with no access to Internet, provide direct contact with women who need assistance, and can develop local resources and expertise to meet women's needs for access to safe abortion.

II. Principles of the Hotline

Women on Waves believes that well-trained volunteers, backed up by medical professionals, can respond to women's needs for safe abortion information. The hotline does not claim to give expert medical information, but can be an excellent resource for answering women's questions about abortion and reproductive health and a referral source to help women find the expert care that they need.

The goal of the hotline is to give women-centered, supportive care to every caller. No question is too small, and no problem is too large. Every woman who calls will be given respect, medically accurate advice and/or the best possible referrals.

III. Legal Rationale for the Hotline

As hotlines are established in countries where abortion is illegal, it is important to understand why the hotline does NOT violate the penal code. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Thus providing information, through the hotline or otherwise, is not illegal. The European Court of Human Rights has specifically established the right to give information about abortion services abroad (and for women to receive that information) in 1992.

It is important to consult with a local lawyer. The hotline staff must use their language to ensure that they are always giving information, not inciting women to perform an illegal act. In this manner the hotline staff cannot be prosecuted for inciting, participating or as an accessory to a crime. It is important to know whether in a given country it is mandatory to denounce a woman who has induced or received an abortion.



A lawyer and the hotline staff must consider particular local laws including

- Status of freedom of information laws (most have these laws in the Constitution and this has absolute priority over other laws). It is important to research whether there have been court cases concerning the freedom of information and what the decisions in these cases has been.
- Incitement of a crime or participation in a crime. Intent to commit a crime is usually not an issue as the laws around intent usually refer to crimes with very severe punishment (usually abortion is not severe enough) and if it is mandatory to denounce somebody who has done an abortion or plans to do one. However, the legal definition of intent should also be researched.
- Statutes on abortion should be examined to see if giving information about abortion is specifically outlawed. Also, research the history of cases on abortion to clarify whether there have been any decisions that could affect the hotline (for example, has anybody ever been convicted for giving information about abortion)

Most penal laws do not explicitly mention that giving information about abortion is a crime. Therefore giving information cannot be constructed as incitement or participation, as long as the hotline staff uses language very carefully.

In almost every country there are exceptions that allow abortion to save the life and/or health of the woman. It is important that the lawyer frame arguments that clearly show how giving information about abortion is saving women's life and/or health.



IV. How to Set up a Hotline

- a. Getting Started
- b. Recruiting Volunteers and Building a Team
- c. Training Hotline Volunteers

a. Getting Started

These are the basic components needed to set up a hotline:

- Gather at least 5 volunteers who are willing to train and be available to answer the hotline.
- Find a sympathetic lawyer who can help determine the boundaries of the hotline. Push him/her on the freedom of information issue. (See Section III, Legal Rationale) Make an agreement about his/her costs if there are legal problem. Make sure he/she is committed!
- Develop a resource list with contact phone and other information so you can give good referrals to callers. Examples of resources that should be on the list include:
 - a) Domestic violence
 - b) Family planning and contraceptive advice
 - c) Homosexual rights and counseling
 - d) Post-abortion care
 - e) Psychological counseling
 - f) Other health care issues
- Establish a special phone number for calls from press, allies, referral sources, etc. This can be at an existing organization or a separate new number.
- Set up the hotline
 - a) Establish a number; decide if it can be toll-free or a call back SMS (text) service. Discuss the pros and cons of a landline or mobile line. You can use a prepaid Sim card with a number that is easy to remember or sign a contract.
 - b) Determine the hours the hotline will be working (for example 3 hours per day in the evening).
 - c) Prepare message for when hotline is closed that states clearly when the hotline is working.
- Create a resource binder or website with all training information, referrals, and standard answers to most common questions.
- Create a hotline book for tracking your callers and the follow-up. You should register all the phone calls you make and receive. The first pages of the book will be used for an overview the women to be called back and to keep track of how many calls come in. Divide the pages by date.



- Create an intake page for the hotline book for each woman. Examples of what should be on this intake page include:
 - Date of call
 - Name
 - Phone number or way to contact the woman
 - City where she lives
 - Age
 - Date of last menstruation
 - Medical history – is she healthy or does she have any medical problems
 - Medication used by the woman
 - How long she thinks she is pregnant

Remember that the information in this book could create problems if it falls into the hands of hostile authorities. Create a plan for keeping the intake pages secure.

b. Recruiting Volunteers and Building a Team

To start a hotline, it is important to have a core of at least 5 volunteers who trust each other and work well together. In countries where abortion is legally restricted, it is natural to be fearful of speaking out. Therefore it is important to think about how you recruit and how you build a team.

Recruiting

Natural sources of good volunteers are women and men who are already involved in activist work or reproductive health work. It is important to find volunteers who are trustworthy and cooperative with each other. The smartest volunteer in the world is not useful if she/he antagonizes those she/he works with!

Building a Team

Once there is a core of volunteers, it is important to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and connection. It is this atmosphere of trust that you also want to create with the women who call the hotline.

To build this trust and connection with the team, bring all the volunteers together for 3-4 hours, at a time that works well for everyone.

- Start with asking each volunteer to say a little about herself, and what motivates her to join the hotline. The goal is to understand why each volunteer has joined the group.
- Ask each volunteer to tell about someone she knows who has had or has needed an abortion. She can speak about herself, a friend, a family member, or someone she has read about. The goal is to share stories that create a shared sense of the experiences women in your country have had with abortion.
- Ask each volunteer to think of someone in your country who has stood up against injustice in some way. This can be as personal as standing up to a bully or as political as attending a demonstration against the government. Ask each volunteer to say what it took to find the courage to stand up, how it felt to stand up, and how they feel now talking about the courage



they showed during that event. The goal is to share examples and experiences of standing up for what you believe in.

- Ask each volunteer to share what she hopes to get out of the experience of working on the hotline.

At the end of the session, ask everyone if they have suggestions for future ways to build your team. Thank everyone for coming, and schedule a time for the volunteer training.

c. Training Hotline Volunteers

Your perfect hotline volunteer should have two qualities: willingness to listen carefully, and access to accurate information. Both of these qualities are equally important in providing quality services to women.

Training volunteers takes some time. Before the formal training, each volunteer should read "*How can I do an abortion*" and "*Q and A*" pages from the Women On Waves website, www.womenonwaves.org and www.womenonweb.org. (If there is no computer access, request copies of these pages from Women on Waves.)

Training Tips:

If possible, get a place with access to Internet. Use the: "*How can I do an abortion*" and "*Q and A*" pages from the Women on Waves website for the training. (If this is not possible, print out the pages from the website or request copies from Women on Waves.)

Use role-playing with the "*Q and A*" as a learning experience. One person pretends to be women in need, the other volunteer who answers hotline.

Make sure that all the volunteers read all the supporting medical papers published by the WHO. Discuss with them any doubts and provide additional knowledge.



V. How to Respond to Callers

Recommendations on how to speak to women on the phone:

- Remember that every situation is unique – listen carefully to the situation and story of each woman and personalize your advice to her needs.
- Try to be warm, nice, and comprehensive. Make a woman feel that she can trust you and she can be taken care of. You are often the only one she can speak to. Build a relationship.
- Always try not to scare a woman but to reassure her. Recognize and acknowledge to her that you understand that her situation is difficult and stressful. At the same time also be realistic and explicit if you feel that her health is at risk.
- Always give a possible solution to her request/problem. Avoid the attitude “*we cannot help you anyhow*”. Even if you cannot directly help, you can always refer her to another organization and give her emotional support. Imagine yourself in her shoes. Show your interest!
- When women call the hotline, always ask if you can call them back. This is an important way to get their phone number, prioritize those calls that are most urgent, and it is also cheaper for women and therefore more accessible. If the hotline phone works with a prepaid card, make sure there is always enough credit on the card.

Remind volunteers that:

- Answers at the hotline should always be based on scientific information for legal reasons. Volunteers should never give personal opinions or information that is not based on knowledge. If you get a question you cannot answer, let the woman know that you need to research the answer and find out how to get back in contact with her once you have accurate information.
- Never “invent” any answers that you are not sure about. You can always call back after consulting an expert.
- It is very important that volunteers listen and show sympathy to all women. Some of the women eventually may have to be referred to a professional.
- Always answer directly all the queries of women. However, be careful to use language that does not encourage a woman to choose or to have an abortion – volunteers help women who have already decided to have an abortion to have information that increases women’s safety.
- Always contact coordinators if you have a question.



- Volunteers are NOT medical experts, but can give very accurate information about medical abortion. When a woman has a complicated medical situation, it is important to refer her to a medical professional.

Remember the two principles – be supportive and compassionate, and give accurate information.

To make sure the hotline is not accused of encouraging a crime one should be very careful how to give information. See *Section V*.

Most of the information you will need to help women is found in the Appendix A and B

- Give women who have access to internet the leaflets or addresses of websites of Women on Waves and Women on Web (alternatively "mujeres sobra las olas.com" or "comoabortar.com")
- Give women who cannot find misoprostol or if misoprostol is very expensive the Women on Web website address (alternatively "nececitounaborto.com" "ineedanabortion.com") or give the phone number or act as an intermediar to the website in case women cannot access internet themselves.

Important Rules about Language

Never disclose any logistical or personal information about people working on the project to anyone outside of the project.

It is important to use the general sense, not direct instructions to women. For example:

Never say:

- You can use
- Legal/illegal Abortion
- Countries where abortion is illegal

Instead do say:

- A woman can use
- Safe/unsafe Abortion
- Countries with no access to safe abortion

Press might call and pretend that they are women looking for help.

If the press calls the hotline, give them the general phone number:

1. Tell them that you cannot give them any information. Do not answer any questions and refer them to the press officer.
2. Be very friendly.
3. Tell them you have to keep the line free for women that need help.
4. Hang up.

If people call who are against abortion or who try to offend you:



1. Do not engage in the discussion and stay calm.
2. Do not listen any further and cut them short.
3. Tell them you have to keep the line free for women that need help.
4. Hang up the phone immediately after saying that and do not spend any more time talking to them.

VI. Hotline Protocols

- A hotline book where you should register all the phone calls you have made is available for use. (See Section III Getting Started)
- The police or justice department might tape the hotline. Take that into account when talking with women. Also be careful when you talk about the hotline in public; assume everybody is listening to you.
- The rate of hotline calls varies, and can depend on the total number of hours each week that the hotline is open. Usually there are up to 20 calls each day of women seeking and some anti's (5 to 10). There are not very many calls about contraceptives use – that can vary dependently on the region. Sometimes women write an SMS (text message) and ask to be called back.
- A flood of SMS (text messages) from anti's can block the hotline. Write down the numbers if there are threats and delete the messages.
- Some requests for help come by email to the organization responsible for running the hotline. The hotline team should make a schedule of who will check for hotline emails and answer them. It is best to formulate a standard answer like e.g. “If you have a phone please give us the number and we will call you”, and put this on auto respond.
- Have a calendar at hand so that you can calculate the days a woman is pregnant. Some women have irregular menstruations and it can be difficult. The duration of the pregnancy is usually calculated at 2 weeks after the first day of the last menstruation. (LMP – last menstrual period).
- Create new standard answers if you see need for it and add them to your “standard questions and answers”. Review this periodically and keep adding new information as needed.
- If women send SMS (text messages) because it is cheaper, prepare SMS (text) messages with answers max 160 characters).
Example: Abortion: 4 pills misoprostol under your tongue. Repeat 4 pills miso. after 3 hours and than again 4 after 3 hours. If bleeding more 2 max pads/hour for 2 hours or more, go to doctor!



VII. Launching the Hotline

a. Before the Launch

b. Media/Press Events

c. Public Awareness Events

The hotline will only be useful if people know it exists. Therefore, it is important to think creatively about how to let people know about it.

Here are some ideas:

a. Before the Launch of the Hotline:

Inform other women's, feminist and abortion rights groups and ask them to make supportive statements to the press. If they do not wish to be publicly supportive, ask that they not say anything negative to the press about the hotline

For the public launch of the hotline, you can do a media event and/or public awareness strategies.

b. Media/Press Event:

- Plan action and time of launch.
- Hotline number has to be visible at all times, during press conference etc.
- Mobilize more groups and volunteers to participate in launch hotline.
- Appoint 2 or 3 people who will be the spokespersons for the hotline, decide on a coordinated message.
- Find a sympathetic doctor who is willing to discuss the safety of the hotline for the press. (Make sure you can refer the press to him/her) if you cannot find such a doctor, one of the Women on Waves doctors will come.
- Prepare a media strategy. (*How to Handle the Media* in Appendix C)
 - a) Make list of local papers, radio and television to send the press release. Include community and national radio and television. Think about using blogs.
 - b) Media contact phone number should be different than the hotline number (you do not want to keep hotline busy with press, it is meant for women. If press calls hotline refer them to the other number).
 - c) Contact journalists that will be sympathetic to the case in advance
 - d) Prepare a press release. Remember that the press is only interested in controversial issues. The launch should be an action that is controversial together with a press conference to explain the hotline idea. Send the press release 48 hours before your event.



- e) Prepare a press statement. Use clear language and focus on the safety of home abortion with pills. Do not address the risk of illegal abortions.
- f) For press who come to the event, make a press package with the press release, the press statement and information from the WHO on the use of misoprostol and safe abortion.
- g) See Appendix C and D for tips on preparing to deal with the media,
- h) Choose a media that reaches women in your target area (consider radio) and identify a clear message that will reach these women.
- i) Try to find media icons or respected figures to be spokespeople for the hotline to the media.

Remember, there is no such thing as bad media. The goal is that the hotline is covered widely so that women can learn about it

c. Public Awareness Strategies:

Be creative in finding ways to let women know about your hotline.

Some ideas include:

- Street actions like graffiti, stickers, and flyers with hotline number
- Advertise the hotline number in the newspapers
- Stamp the hotline number on money
- Hang banner in controversial public place with "safe abortion" and the hotline number
- Launch in the parliament (Make T-shirts with each one or 2 letters/ numbers and sit so that when you stand up the text "safe abortion and hotline number" appears)

Street theater such as "we will do an abortion in public" - 5 women will take misoprostol in front of the banner with hotline number at public place. Inform police, minister of justice and anti-abortion groups that women will induce their abortion. Be sure and let the press know you have informed the police and minister of justice. See what the reactions are. If there is no intervention, on the next day, send out a press release that emphasizes the safety of women getting information and performing safe abortion with medicines. The press release should emphasize that the laws are ancient, inhumane and do not reflect women's reality. If you feel that it is safe and appropriate, you can also use parody and try to ridicule the ancient laws.

For any of these publicity strategies, plan carefully. Decide what exactly you want to accomplish, a start and end time, and what problems and risks you might encounter. For any activity, think about whether you want to include a press strategy to get more attention to your actions. If you will be engaging with the press, see Appendix C and D.



Appendix A

Information on Using Misoprostol for Early Abortion

In countries where abortion is illegal, Misoprostol alone can be used to cause an abortion. Misoprostol causes contractions of the womb. As a consequence, the womb expels the pregnancy. A woman can get painful cramps, vaginal blood loss that is more than a normal menstruation, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. There is a risk of heavy bleeding for which a woman will have to be treated by a doctor.

The chance that an abortion with Misoprostol will be successful is more than 80-90% if the woman follows the instructions below. Misoprostol is available in pharmacies in almost all countries. Incorrect use of Misoprostol can be harmful for the health of a woman!!

Before using Misoprostol

- A woman should make sure she is pregnant by taking a pregnancy test or having an ultrasound.
- A woman should not do a medical abortion herself if she is more than 9 weeks (63 days from last menstrual period) pregnant.
- Misoprostol should only be used if a woman is 100% sure that she wants to end the pregnancy.
- A woman should never attempt to do the abortion alone.
 - While having the abortion, it is important to have someone close by; this can be the partner, a friend or a relative who knows about the abortion and who can help in case of complications. Once the bleeding starts, someone should stay in contact with the woman to be able to help in case complications occur.
- Misoprostol can only be used without medical guidance when a woman has no serious illness.
 - Some serious illnesses, such as severe anemia, can create problems because of the heavy blood loss involved. Serious illnesses are sometimes a reason for a legal abortion, even in countries with restrictive laws.
- A woman must not use alcohol or drugs during the treatment!!!
- Misoprostol should not be used when there is a possibility of an ectopic (or extra-uterine) pregnancy.
 - An ectopic (or extra-uterine pregnancy) is not in the womb (uterus). An ectopic pregnancy can be detected by having an ultrasound. Treatment by a gynecologist is then necessary to ensure the health of the woman. If not treated, there is a risk of heavy internal bleeding due to rupturing of the fallopian tube. Gynaecologists treat women for this condition in all countries, even in countries where abortion is illegal. An ectopic pregnancy cannot be treated with Misoprostol.
- Misoprostol should never be used if the woman has an intra uterine device (IUD).
 - An IUD is a contraceptive, a small coil of about 3 cm inserted by a doctor in the womb to prevent pregnancy. A Woman who has an IUD and is pregnant must have an ultrasound made because the risk of an ectopic pregnancy is higher. If the pregnancy is in the uterus, it is necessary to have the IUD removed before using doing the abortion.



- Misoprostol should only be used when transportation within a few hours to a hospital is possible. That way, if complications occur, medical aid will be near.
- Misoprostol should never be used if the woman is allergic to Misoprostol or any other prostaglandin.
 - This is a rare condition, which a woman will be aware of if she has used these medicines and had such a reaction before.
- A possible sexual transmitted infection should be treated.
 - If there is a risk of a sexual transmitted infection (STI, also known as a sexually transmitted disease, STD) such as chlamydia or gonorrhoea, arrange an examination with a doctor so that the infection can be treated properly. The risk of such an infection is increased after rape (in a lot of countries a reason for a legal abortion, should pregnancy occur), or when one has had sex with an unknown person. Having an untreated sexual transmitted infection increases the risk of an inflammation of the womb and fallopian tubes. Such an inflammation is called a pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) or salpingitis or adnexitis.

How to use Misoprostol

To cause an abortion, a woman needs 12 pills of 200 micrograms each of misoprostol. First, she must put 4 pills of 200 micrograms (in total 800 mcg) Misoprostol under the tongue and she **MUST NOT** swallow (at least until 30 minutes after putting the tablets under the tongue!!)

After 3 hours she should put another 4 pills of Misoprostol under the tongue. No swallowing!

After 3 hours she should put another 4 pills of Misoprostol under the tongue again for a third time. Do not swallow.

After the first dose of Misoprostol a woman should expect bleeding and cramps. Bleeding mostly starts within four hours after using the pills, but sometimes later. Bleeding is often the first sign that the abortion starts. If the abortion continues, bleeding and cramps become more severe. Bleeding is often more and heavier than a normal menstruation, and there can be clots. The longer the pregnancy, the more heavy the cramps and the bleeding will be. If the abortion is complete, the bleeding and the cramps diminish. The moment of abortion can be noticed with a peak of heavier blood loss and more pain and cramps. Depending on the length of the pregnancy, a small pregnancy sac with some tissue around can or cannot be seen. For instance, if the woman is only five to six weeks pregnant, there will be no visible sac. At nine weeks, a woman could probably find a sac in between the blood.

If no bleeding occurs after the third dose, the abortion did not take place and the woman has to try it again after a couple of days or travel abroad to a country where it is legal or try again to find a doctor.

If a woman wants to relieve the pain, she can use Tylenol/Paracetamol or Ibuprofen.

Bleeding after the Abortion

Bleeding continues lightly one to two weeks after the abortion, but sometimes shorter or longer. The normal menstrual period mostly returns after four to six weeks.



Some women bleed without having an abortion. Therefore it is important that the woman makes sure that an abortion really occurred. It can take two to three weeks before a pregnancy test becomes negative. So if possible, she should have an ultrasound made about one week after the abortion to make sure the womb is empty.

Side Effects

The most common side effects are nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. A woman can also have some fever. These are generally less severe if Misoprostol is used vaginally.

When To Contact A Doctor Or Go To A Hospital

A) If there is heavy bleeding

A heavy bleeding is a bleeding that lasts for more than 2-3 hours and soaks more than 2-3 maxi sanitary pads per hour. Feeling dizzy or light-headed can be a sign of too much blood loss, which is dangerous to the woman's health.

If heavy bleeding does not diminish after 2-3 hours, it might be a sign of an incomplete abortion (remains of the pregnancy are still in the womb), which needs medical treatment. This can happen a couple of hours after taking Misoprostol but also two weeks or longer after the abortion. In this case a woman should go to the nearest hospital or doctor to seek help.

B) If there is a fever

Chills are a normal side effect of Misoprostol as well as some elevation of body temperature. However, if the woman has a fever (> 38 degrees Celsius) for more than 24 hours, or if she has a fever of more than 39 degrees, contact a doctor, because there might be an infection as a result of an incomplete abortion that needs treatment (with antibiotics and/or vacuum aspiration).

C) If the Misoprostol did not work

If the Misoprostol did not cause any bleeding at all or there was a little bleeding, the pregnancy has continued. It could be an ectopic pregnancy (outside the womb), and **MUST** be treated by a doctor. This is a life-threatening situation.

If it is a normal pregnancy, and the misoprostol did not work, there is a small increased risk of birth defects such as deformities of the hands or feet and problems with the nerves of the foetus. Because of this risk of a birth defect, a vacuum aspiration should be done if the woman does not have an abortion spontaneously after taking Misoprostol. If more than 14 days after the use of Misoprostol no abortion has occurred, and if no doctor is willing to help, there remains no other option than to travel to another country to have a legal abortion or to keep the pregnancy.

When a woman goes to the hospital or seeks medical treatment:

If the woman put the pills in her vagina instead of under her tongue, and needs to seek medical help, the woman should feel with her fingers if there are any remaining tablets and remove



them! If the medical professionals in the hospital find the remaining pills, they will know the woman tried to cause an abortion herself. In countries where abortion is a crime, doctors or nurses sometimes denounce women who have attempted an abortion to the police. We recommend, if possible, to find a doctor the woman trusts.

In countries where women can be prosecuted for having an abortion, it is not necessary to tell the medical staff that one tried to induce an abortion. Women can say they think that they had a spontaneous miscarriage. The doctor CANNOT see the difference (unless there are remains of tablets in the vagina) The treatment is also the same. The treatment is, curettage, also known as vacuum aspiration, a doctor will empty the womb. Doctors have the obligation to help in all cases.

After using Misoprostol:

- Women should get good contraception to prevent a new unwanted pregnancy.
- An IUD can be inserted by a doctor as soon as the bleeding has finished and a pregnancy test is negative or when an ultrasound shows an empty womb.
- Oral contraceptives can be taken once the bleeding is finished as well, but they will not be completely safe during the first month. Use extra contraceptives such as condoms for extra protection during the first month.



Appendix B

Sample Q & A (First read Appendix A!)

It is very important to give general information. Never say "you should" as this can be interpreted as encouraging a woman to commit a crime.

Please go to <http://www.womenonwaves.org/article-457-en.html> for a full set of questions. These should be printed out and available to the hotline volunteers at all times.

“I’m pregnant and need an abortion” or “I have an unwanted pregnancy, what can I do?”

Thanks for your question. I understand you are in a difficult situation. In order to give the most appropriate advice, could you tell me when you had your last period?

(Then, once you know woman is less than 9 weeks pregnant...) If a woman is less than 9 weeks pregnant, she could safely take medicines to end your pregnancy. There are two ways a woman can do this. She can use misoprostol (also called cytotec), which is available in this country. Misoprostol is 80-85% effective in ending an early pregnancy when used correctly. She could also contact Women on Web, where after she does a consultation a doctor can prescribe mifepristone/misoprostol which will be sent to her. That is 95-98% effective.

“How can I get cytotec/misoprostol?”

In many countries, cytotec/misoprostol is available from pharmacies. A woman does not need to say why she needs it. Misoprostol is also used to treat arthritis and for gastric ulcers.

“I can not get cytotec; I tried to buy it from the pharmacy”

If a woman has access to the Internet she can find help from an organization called “Women on Web” or go to Womenonweb.org (or comoabortar.com). Women on Web can refer women to a doctor who can prescribe mifepristone and misoprostol. Other women have found ways to get misoprostol or cytotec. They get it without prescription by buying it for somebody with arthritis; they falsify prescriptions, or buy it on the black-market.

“I had my period before date X”

Scientific research has proven that a woman can safely do an abortion at home with misoprostol alone till 9 weeks of pregnancy. Misoprostol is also known as cytotec and can be bought in any pharmacy with a prescription. It is normally used for stomach ulcers or arthritis. A woman needs 12 tablets of 200 mcg each.

A woman should put 4 tablets under her tongue. 4 hours later she should again put 4 tablets under her tongue. 4 hours later she should repeat 4 tablets under her tongue, for a total of 12 tablets. (4 tablets under her tongue 3 times, 4 hours apart.) She will experience cramps and bleeding. When there is severe bleeding, pain, fever or no bleeding a woman should contact a doctor.



“ Why can I not swallow the pills?”

The medicines do not work well when swallowed, and they also cause more nausea. It is also best not to use them vaginally because remains can be found up to 4 days later. Therefore the use under the tongue is the most safe and effective.

“Could I get a complication?”

After use of misoprostol it is possible that the abortion is incomplete. This always causes symptoms like too much bleeding and pain. In this case a woman has to seek medical support and she can go to a hospital. She can say that she has had a miscarriage because the doctors cannot see she induced the abortion herself.

If a woman bleeds more than 2 max pads/per hour for more than 2 hours she should see a doctor. If the volunteer has any doubt always refer the woman to a doctor!

“I do not have access to the Internet”

If you want we can make an appointment to teach you to use the Internet.

“I took the misoprostol 2 days ago. I am still bleeding and I have a discharge. What should I do?”

If you feel weakness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, pain in your belly, if your belly feels sore or tender, if you bleed a lot or for a long time, or if you have vaginal discharge that smells bad, you might have an infection and you should go to a doctor immediately. The infection should be treated with antibiotics.

You must go to a hospital or a doctor to treat the infection if you have any of these symptoms. In countries where women can be prosecuted for having an abortion, it is not necessary to tell the medical staff that you tried to induce an abortion; you can that say that you had a spontaneous miscarriage. There are no tests that can show that a woman has done a medical abortion. It is extremely important to treat an incomplete abortion. The treatment for incomplete abortion is called a vacuum aspiration, or “curettage.” Any clinic that can deal with complications of miscarriage can also help women with incomplete abortions, because the symptoms are the same.

A woman can tell him/her that she thinks she had a miscarriage but she was feeling OK until now so she got worried and wanted to check what was going on. She can tell them that nearly a month ago she had delayed menstruation that was heavier and now she has these symptoms and she doesn't know what is happening.

“I had an abortion two years ago. Now I am pregnant again. Can it hurt me to take misoprostol again?”

Women are fertile for about 40 years. Some women need more than one abortion because for example contraception fails or some women cannot choose when to have sexual relations, or because contraception or information about it is inaccessible. Having a safe abortion, or more than one safe abortion, does not impact a woman's health or ability to have children in future.



“I am more than 12 weeks pregnant. Can I use misoprostol for abortion?”

If a woman is more than 13-20 weeks pregnant, she can still use misoprostol to induce an abortion. WHO studies show that a woman should take 2 tablets of 200 mcg each either vaginally or under the tongue every 3 hours up to a total of 5 doses (10 tablets). If a woman uses the tablets vaginally they are more effective. However, if she goes to the doctor she will need to first use her finger to remove all traces of the tablets from her vagina, so in some cases she may choose to use the tablets under the tongue if she is worried about legal issues. After 24 hours, this method is effective approximately 80% of the time. As there may be very heavy cramping and bleeding, it is important to be close to a hospital in case she needs medical care.

“When will I start bleeding and how long will it last?”

After using Misoprostol a woman should expect bleeding and cramps. Although some women start bleeding and cramping within a few minutes of taking the misoprostol, it is more common for bleeding to start within four hours of using the pills, or even later. Bleeding is often the first sign that the abortion has begun. If the abortion continues, bleeding and cramps become more severe. Bleeding is often heavier than a normal menstruation, and there can be clots. The longer the pregnancy has developed, the heavier the cramps and the bleeding will be. If the abortion is complete, the bleeding and the cramps diminish. The moment of abortion can be noticed with a peak of heavier blood loss and more pain and cramps. Normally the bleeding will continue lightly for one to two weeks after the abortion, but times may vary. The normal menstrual period usually returns after four to six weeks.

“I took a pregnancy test and am 6 weeks pregnant. I took the misoprostol but had very little bleeding. Is this normal?”

If you do not pass tissue and blood after taking the Misoprostol, you might have an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that grows outside the womb, usually in a fallopian tube. It is a life-threatening situation because if the pregnancy grows too large it can cause the tube burst. This must always be treated with an operation or medicines. A medical abortion does not treat a pregnancy outside the womb!

You can make sure that your pregnancy is inside the womb by having an ultrasound to see if the pregnancy is outside of the womb. If you have sudden severe pain in your belly or back, if you feel you might faint or if you do faint, or if you feel pain in the shoulder area, you might have an ectopic pregnancy that has burst and you should go to a hospital immediately. Ectopic pregnancies are treated everywhere, even in places where abortion is severely restricted.

“I used Misoprostol, there was some blood loss but not that much, has the abortion been successful?”

It is very difficult to determine whether an abortion has been successful and complete. The only way to make sure is to have an ultrasound. A woman could tell the doctor that she thinks she had a miscarriage. She could also take a pregnancy test after 3 weeks.

Should a woman be still pregnant, then she can repeat the treatment in a couple of days. Scientific research has proven that it is most effective if the woman puts 4 tablets Misoprostol under the tongue. Do not swallow!! After 3 hours she should put another 4 pills of Misoprostol



under the tongue. 3 Hours later she should use 4 pill of Misoprostol under her tongue again for a third time.

“I cannot get Misoprostol. Could you please send them to me?”

If a woman lives in a country where there is no access to safe and legal abortion she can either:
1- Go to www.womenonweb.org, an on-line medical abortion referral service that provides help for women living where access is restricted. For a donation of 70 euro she will receive a medical abortion (with Mifepristone and Misoprostol which is 99% effective to induce an abortion) at her home address.

2- If she lives close to a country where abortion is permitted, she might also decide she would rather travel. For travel information to abortion clinics in other countries she can go to www.womenonwaves.org/article-456-en.html and click on any country for listings of safe abortion services in that country.

“What are the risks?”

Many illegal abortions are unsafe and are carried out without proper information, resulting in women getting infections or other complications. Because women often don't dare to go to the hospital, treatments are often too late.

Therefore it is important to follow the instructions carefully and to seek medical attention as soon as possible in case there is:

Heavy bleeding

Symptom: Bleeding that lasts for more than 2 hours and soaks more than 2 maxi sanitary pads per hour. Feeling dizzy or light-headed can be a sign of too much blood loss. This is dangerous to a woman's health and must be treated by a doctor.

Treatment: a vacuum aspiration (curettage)

Incomplete abortion

Symptoms: heavy or persistent bleeding and/or persistent severe pain.

Treatment: a vacuum aspiration (curettage)

Infection

Symptom: If a woman has a fever (more than 38 degrees Celsius) for more than 24 hours, or has a fever of more than 39 degrees, there might be an infection that needs treatment.

Treatment: antibiotics and/or vacuum aspiration.

If a woman thinks she might have a complication she should go to a doctor immediately. If she lives in a place where abortion is a crime and she doesn't have a doctor she trusts, she can still access medical care. She does not have to tell the medical staff that she tried to induce an abortion; she can tell them that she had a spontaneous miscarriage. Doctors have the obligation to help in all cases.

The symptoms are exactly the same and the doctor will not be able to see or test for any evidence of an abortion, as long as the pills have completely dissolved. If a woman took the pills vaginally, she must check with her finger to make sure that they are dissolved. Traces of the pills may be found in the vagina up to four days after inserting them.



“Can I go to work while doing the abortion? For how long must I rest before returning to work?”

It is best to take Misoprostol on the weekends or when a woman can rest for a bit. The bleeding usually starts 3-5 hours after the first doses, bleeding should be heavy and during this heavy bleeding cramps may occur, for this reason it is not recommended that a woman go to work during treatment. As soon as she feels well enough to return to her normal routine she may do so.

“Can Misoprostol be detected in a blood test?”

It is very unlikely. It can be detected ONLY if a doctor actively is looking for it in a research setting and only within a couple of hours after it has been used (there is no misoprostol detectable in the blood after 12 hours). The test is extremely expensive and most doctors do not have the laboratory facilities necessary – it is not a part of a normal blood test.



Appendix C

How to Handle the Media

To avoid any confusion about how the campaign is presented to the press, there should be official spokes persons who are clear on the politics and strategies. Other volunteers should not make statements to the press other than what is provided on the fact sheet. Volunteers may of course talk on a personal level to the press or explain to the general public what the issues are, provided they use the language from the fact sheet. Please use common sense as to what to say for the general good of the campaign. The press can sometimes become rude and pushy. Please stay cooperative and polite.

The press may be interested to know what motivates the volunteers and may want to write a profile. All volunteers should first check with the media team or spokespersons before giving press or TV interviews.

What you need to know about journalists:

1. Journalists are generalists not specialists.

Most journalists know a little bit about a lot of issues. Few journalists are specialized.

For you this means:

- *Realize that journalists aren't very well informed about the public health issues or history of abortion and unsafe abortion in general.*
- *Prepare a short statement with some general facts about how unsafe abortion harms women and why the hotline is necessary to protect women's lives and health. Read the Q & A to learn about the facts most asked for by journalists and learn them by heart.*
- *Don't speak in 'jargon' about medical or ethical issues. Do try to give the protocol for safe use of misoprostol. If the journalist publishes this, many women will learn how to do a safe abortion!*

2. Journalists always work with deadlines.

They usually work under extreme time pressure and as a result, they don't have time for very complex items or small details. That's why they like "fast, short, to the point" information or "sound bites".

For you this means:

- *Use the fact sheet. Give a short but clear answer if you know the answer*
- *Don't try to answer 'difficult' questions but send the journalist politely to the spokespersons*
- *Read, practice and remember the 'sound bites'*



3. A journalist needs 'scoops'.

To be a good journalist one has to be faster, sharper, better and earlier in getting the news than one's colleagues. He needs 'scoops' or exclusive news in order to distinguish himself from the others.

For you this means:

- *Remember journalists are in a permanent 'rat race' with their colleagues, because they have to score. It also means that if an item is 'hot news' all the media will follow because they don't want to stay behind.*
- *Remember also: good news doesn't sell - if 'it bleeds, it leads'. Journalists look for sensational news. They believe that this is what the public wants. They will often try to focus on the most sensational part of your story or change your words to make the story more dramatic.*

4. To do his job a journalist needs information and YOU are his source.

For you this means:

- *Be aware of the fact that a journalist will try to gather his information 24 hours a day. "Off the record doesn't exist". A journalist is **always** on duty.*
- *Don't talk 'off the record'. If you don't want to be quoted, don't say anything. Remember this when you are having a drink with a journalist or when you're talking together without the journalist writing or filming.*
- *Realize you can be filmed at any time, so be aware of your appearance and of every word that you say.*

5. We need the journalist as much as he needs us.

We want to attract media attention in order to catalyze public discussion about abortion.

For you this means: *Try to cooperate with the journalist!!*

Do's and don'ts of dealing with the media

Remember: the journalist needs you in order to do his job. You are his source.

This doesn't mean you have to answer all the questions. Also it is not always desirable that you answer. Your goal is to repeat your message, even if it doesn't fit the question that you are asked!

Don't

- Don't talk "off the record"
- Don't make jokes
- Don't discuss ethical or medical matters with journalists
- Don't talk 'on behalf of or about others', but speak in the name of your organization
- Use the name of your organization instead of saying "we"



- Don't let the journalist convince you to make a statement. Give a friendly smile and say you have to continue with your work
- Give facts, not your personal opinion
- Never lie
- Don't attack the journalist; he's just doing his job
- Don't speak too fast
- Never lose your temper
- Never say: no comment or I don't know, but give a reason why you can't answer a question and say for example:
- 'I am not authorized to answer this question, but I can refer you to the person in charge'.

Do's

- Always tell the truth
- If you don't know the answer you explain politely why you can't and you say for example:
- 'I am afraid I can't answer your question, but I give you the name and the number of a person who could inform you further'.
- Be positive about the whole campaign
- Be friendly and polite, but remember; the journalist is not your friend
- Give explanation, don't only say 'yes' or 'no', but tell why things are like they are
- Give the protocol for safe use of misoprostol for abortion. If the journalist publishes this, many women will learn how to do a safe abortion!
- When you are filmed: stand straight, keep your head still, speak slowly and look in the camera
- Be professional. Think about what you are wearing and how you present yourself (see Appendix D)
- Think about having a large poster with how to safely use misoprostol – and hope that this is captured in the media!

DO prepare, prepare, prepare! Use the Q and A on p. 26 to understand how to answer questions you don't want to answer!

How can you be professional?

- Try to obtain accurate information about the media the journalist works for. If he works for a Catholic newspaper it is good for you to realize this when you give your answers.
- Know what you want to say and how you want to say it. Practice some of the Q and A below and from your fact sheet
- Show that you're involved and interested
- Be compassionate and persuasive

Exercises

- Formulate your personal answers and practice them
- Formulate several polite, professional answers to questions you can't answer
- Using Appendix D, the spokespersons should role play the Q & A to prepare for any press event



Appendix D

Press Q and A for Launching a Hotline

To Prepare For A Press Event or Press Conference

Appearance

It is important to look professional and be prepared for cameras.

- Wear professional and appropriate clothing.
- Dress in colours; no black.
- If you will be in front of the cameras, consider using powder so that your face doesn't look shiny.
- Don't let your hair hide your face.
- Keep your head up and chin down; look straight at the camera, not at the person you are speaking to.
- Decide what to do with your hands, don't make too many wide gestures, and keep them near your body.
- Keep your head still. Stand or sit straight, and try not to wiggle or fidget.

General Speaking Tips

- Practice the Q and A until you feel confident and knowledgeable
- Do not focus on illegally and unsafe of abortion, this confuses the message. Always say something positive in first sentence
- Don't use: "*I believe.*" But use "*scientific research has shown*"
- Talk slow, fluently with expression,
- Just answer the question that is asked in short and clear sentences.
- Do not talk too much. If the journalist keeps quiet do not start getting nervous; just also stay quiet. This is a common journalist's trick to make you say things you have not thought about carefully.
- Keep your message simple and clear!

Knowledge is Power!

Get your local facts (look at websites Guttmacher institute <http://www.guttmacher.org/>, WHO <http://www.who.int/en/>, UNFPA <http://www.unfpa.org/public/>):

- What is the law regarding abortion in your country?
- What is the abortion rate?
- What is the complication (morbidity) and mortality rate of women from unsafe abortion in your country?

Facts:

- 1 in every 300 women undergoing an unsafe abortion dies unnecessarily (in total approximately 70,000 women every year)
- Every year approximately 20 million unsafe abortions take place worldwide.
- Mortality of safe abortion – approximately 1:300,000 (1 in 300,000 women dies from a safe abortion)



- Mortality giving (safe) birth approximately 1:10.000 (1 in 10,000 women dies giving birth in safe conditions)
- Mortality miscarriage (USA) approximately 1:150.000 (in the US, 1 in 150,000 women dies from miscarriage)
- 22% of all pregnancies are ended by an abortion worldwide
- 15% of all confirmed pregnancies end in a natural miscarriage worldwide

Anticipate the misconceptions of the media and general public:

There are myths about abortion in the minds of many, including journalists. Think about these myths and how to dispel them as you prepare to talk to the media. Add other myths from your region to this list.

- 1- Abortion is dangerous
- 2- Abortion has to be done by doctor or in hospital
- 3- Women are irresponsible and unable to make their own decision
- 4- Abortion is immoral and bad
- 5- Abortion is traumatic
- 6- Abortion is rare, and few women get abortions

Think about how you will correct these misconceptions!

PRACTICE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is this campaign about?

This is the launch of a safe abortion hotline. The number is Women can call to get information how to do a safe abortion with pills themselves at home based on research done scientific information by the world health organisation

What kind of information is given on the hotline?

The hotline gives information about safe abortion at home with Misoprostol or cytotec, a medicine that is available here in, and all other sexual health related information. Women can call.....

How can women get the pills?

We know that women have ways to get misoprostol or cytotec. They get it without prescription by buying it for somebody with arthritis; they falsify prescriptions, but it on the black-market or get it through the Internet site of women on web.
For more information women can call.....

But cytotec is only registered to use for ulcers or arthritis

Cytotec is on the list of essential medicines of the World Health Organisation. It is also used in obstetrics and gynaecology (for postpartum haemorrhage, incomplete abortion and to induce birth).

**Are you helping to murder babies?**

Every year 42 million women choose to have an abortion. (In this country every 1 per... woman will have an abortion sometime in her life) These women make a private, moral and responsible decision. These are women are your mothers, friends, sisters, daughters. Many of these women already have children, and are making the decision that they feel is best for their family.

But don't you think it is killing a life/ a child?

This is a personal decision that everybody should make for himself or herself. I believe every woman is capable to make that decision for herself.

Is it illegal to run the hotline?

It is a human right to get and give information. The hotline gives information based on scientific research about safe abortions at home.

Don't you have to respect the laws in this country?

(Number) women have abortions here whatever the law, and what is the most important is that they know how to do it safely. We believe that the hotline will protect women's health and save lives.

Do you promote abortions with this service?

No, we do not promote abortions. We only provide accurate and essential medical and scientific information.

Is this dangerous for women?

An abortion with pills is very safe and effective to do at home till 9 weeks of pregnancy. Millions of women have done abortions at home in United States and Europe and it is standard practice there. The pills are on the list of essential medicines of the WHO.

But in other countries is it done under doctor supervision?

Well, one does not really need a doctor to put 4 pills under your tongue. An abortion with pills is very similar to a miscarriage. Most miscarriages are handled by women themselves without a doctor's supervision.

What if women are more than 9 weeks pregnant?

The pills still works but doses are different and women are advised to take it in the waiting room of a hospital. But for these types of questions it is better to call the hotline number.....

What is the worst thing that can happen?

Like with a spontaneous miscarriage, in rare cases there is too much bleeding. However, like a miscarriage this can easily be treated by a doctor with an aspiration. But in this case women have to look for medical care.

Are foreigners helping with the hotline?

Like other human rights campaigns, this is an international collaboration. Local groups (name them) invited Women on Waves (or/and Women on Web) to join us to develop the hotline.

Could you explain how the abortion pill works?

The abortion pill creates a miscarriage. To induce a miscarriage a woman should use 4 tablets of misoprostol under the tongue, and repeat this with 4 tablets after 4 hours and again after



another 4 hours, for a total of 12 pills. For more specific information, please talk to the doctor.
(Do not answer the question!)

How many women have you helped?

Thousands of women get unsafe abortions in this country every year. We hope the Hotline will give women information to protect their health and their lives *(do not answer the question!)*

How many women are you going to help?

Thousands of women get unsafe abortions in this country every year. We hope the Hotline will give women information to protect their health and their lives *(do not answer the question!)*

Can you introduce me to women who had abortion?

We respect the privacy of every woman who has an abortion. *(Do not answer the question!)*