

Drug restrictions a violation of Canadian women's human rights and freedoms



Dr. Anne Niec, MD, FRCPC
President, Federation of Medical Women of Canada

The Federation of Medical women of Canada (FMWC) believes safe and accessible abortion care is an integral part of a woman's right to good health.

The current restrictions on the accessibility of the mifepristone/misoprostol combination (Myfegymiso in Canada), the so-called "abortion pill", are a violation of Canadian women's right to good health care, a universal human right as identified by the United Nations and to which Canada is a signatory nation. This right to health requires that health services be accessible, available and of good quality.

Given that a mere 16% of hospitals in Canada allow access to abortion services, the arrival of a new abortion pill in Canada has great potential to improve access for all Canadians, particularly women living in rural communities and where services are provided at a great distance.

The unusually rigorous practice guidelines surrounding the prescription of Myfegymiso, including the excessive training expectations of physicians, the requirement for physicians to register to prescribe, the restriction of access to physicians-only, and the requirement that physicians observe patient compliance will severely limit the availability of this therapy for Canadian women.

The mifepristone/misoprostol combination has been on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines since 2005 and is considered the "gold standard" for medical abortion globally. It has been in use in other countries since 1988, with very low rates of complications. The restrictions around the gestational age limit (7 weeks in Canada as opposed to the international standard of 10 weeks), and the requirement of an ultrasound, provide additional barriers to the provision of timely, quality health service.

All of these restrictions, including the decision against Provincial funding of Myfegymiso, as reported in *The Globe and Mail* on September 26, 2016, contribute to a discriminatory practice that will negatively affect access, availability and the quality of care for women across Canada.

This is unacceptable.

The FMWC supports all efforts to create equity of access to all forms of pregnancy planning, including personally appropriate birth control and access to the safest possible abortion when necessary. The introduction of Myfegymiso has the potential to address the current challenges

of abortion access, availability, and inequality of abortion services in women's reproductive health. The restrictions must to be removed and access must be increased to ensure the best care for all Canadian women.

These barriers need to be revealed and eliminated. They are over and above what is medically necessary and they appear to be a means of injecting opposing ethical debate into what is and should be a free and basic human right for women's access to safe reproductive choices.