

## INTRODUCTION OF MEDICAL ABORTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Complications of abortion are among the most important causes of maternal death globally. In Africa, it is estimated that there are 22 unsafe abortions per 1000 women or 1 in 7 live births, and nearly one-fifth of all maternal deaths in the region are linked to unsafe abortion practices. In many low resource countries with limited access to health care services and few trained surgical abortion providers, medical methods of abortion promise to help reduce maternal morbidity and mortality. Furthermore, many women prefer abortion induced by drugs to surgery. Enabling women to choose an alternate method of abortion will improve access to safe services and increased satisfaction.

**What is mifepristone?** Mifepristone is an antiprogestin. When taken orally during the first trimester of pregnancy, mifepristone blocks receptors of the hormone progesterone. As a result the lining of the uterus can no longer sustain the growing embryo. The drug also increases prostaglandin levels and dilates the cervix, facilitating abortion.

**What is misoprostol?** Misoprostol is an E<sub>1</sub> prostaglandin analog that is widely marketed for the treatment and prevention of gastric ulcers. It is widely used “off-label” for a number of reproductive health indications. It induces uterine contractions, facilitating the emptying of the uterus.

### Why is it a good method for low resource countries?

- Medical abortion is a simple, easy to use method that can be adapted for low resource settings
- The drugs used are stable at ambient temperatures and do not require special storage facilities
- Surgical skills are not needed, so medical abortion can be safely delivered by a larger pool of providers
- Women and providers may prefer this non-surgical option

**How does medical abortion with mifepristone and misoprostol work?** One tablet of mifepristone is swallowed first, allowing the developing embryo to detach from the wall of the uterus. Two days later, the woman takes two tablets of misoprostol, causing contractions of the uterus and expelling the uterine products. The timing, dose, and route of administration often vary slightly. Studies have shown that these drugs effectively terminate more than 9 out of 10 pregnancies in the early first trimester.

### Programmatic areas:

- Demonstration projects with medical abortion regimens to introduce the technology in new settings
- Collaboration with pharmaceutical companies to facilitate the registration of the drugs internationally
- Creation of policy, sharing of information and advocating widely for medical abortion technologies
- Development of training and educational materials for policymakers, clinicians, and users
- Organization of seminars, educational opportunities and training courses to share information and stimulate interest in the technology’s potential

### Some current projects:

- Studies to inform service delivery protocols for low resource settings
- Demonstration projects using medical abortion in countries with limited access to legal services
- Partnering with large non-governmental organization service providers to introduce medical abortion
- Training providers and hosting educational forums