Review of Global Public Health Issues

Daniel Grossman, MD
Vice President for Research
Ibis Reproductive Health

University of California
San Francisco
advancing health worldwide™
Unsafe Abortion

- WHO definition
  - A procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both
- Approximately 20 million unsafe abortions annually, resulting in 44,000 deaths
- 15% of maternal deaths in 2013
Unsafe Abortion and Maternal Mortality

- **Leading cause of maternal deaths (10-30%)** in places where safe abortion is not available
  - Africa, Latin America
- Usually eliminated as cause of death where abortion is legal or allowed safely
- Simple, inexpensive technology for safe abortion and post-abortion care (e.g. MUA, misoprostol) widely available
Mortality by Gestational Age
Benin City, Nigeria, 1973-84

All abortions

Abortion deaths

Unuigbe, et al., IJGO 1988
Laws Restrict Access in Many Countries
Cost of Services May Be a Barrier in Countries with Liberal Laws

- Funds all/most abortion: 40
- Partially funds abortion: 10
- Funds exceptional cases: 15
- No public funding: 15
Other Important Barriers to Accessing Safe Abortion Care

• Few or inadequately trained providers
• Lack of access to abortion supplies or medications
• Lack of knowledge of law or services
• Stigma
Misoprostol as Safer Method to Self-induce Abortion

- In Brazil, complications noted be less common with reported use of misoprostol compared to other invasive methods
- In several Latin American countries, abortion-related mortality has declined as misoprostol use has become more prevalent
Misoprostol

- Prostaglandin analogue
- Causes uterine contractions and opening of the cervix
- Causes vaginal bleeding (incomplete abortion)
- When used vaginally in repeated doses, approximately 85% effective in causing complete abortion
How Are Women Accessing Misoprostol?

- Pharmacies
- Informal sector
- From clinicians
- Efforts among women to disseminate information about evidence-based use
Efforts to Address Unsafe Abortion

- Post-abortion care services
- Training on the use of manual vacuum aspiration
- Revision of restrictive laws
- Provision of services within the limits of the law
- Harm-reduction models
Conclusions

• In settings where access to safe abortion is limited—either due to restrictive laws or because of other barriers—unsafe abortion is prevalent

• Unsafe abortion results in significant morbidity and mortality—especially later in pregnancy

• Unsafe abortion is a public health challenge that can be addressed in a variety of ways