

Dear Medical School Director/O&G curriculum lead,

We are writing to every UK medical school about their teaching on abortion, as research shows that many medical schools focus their teaching on the legal and ethical aspects of abortion, with insufficient time spent on the clinical aspects of abortion. [1]

This lack of clinical education means many medical students are not prepared to provide competent, compassionate, ethically informed abortion and post-abortion care when they qualify. It also contributes to the stigmatisation and making an exception of abortion, a procedure that one in three UK women will have by age 45.

Many UK students are not happy with this situation, expressing a desire to be able to provide competent and respectful abortion-related care when they qualify. They believe that the sensitivity of the topic, along with it being so common and so stigmatised should be drivers for comprehensive clinically focused, inclusive education. [2]

The RCOG's Undergraduate Curriculum 2021 specifies that medical students should learn about the clinical aspects of abortion care including treatment and management as well as the legal, ethical, professional aspects of abortion care. [3]

Furthermore, the GMC has included abortion as a presentation and a condition in its Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA) guidance, so all medical students may be assessed on the clinical aspects of abortion in their finals in the near future. [4]

We are aware of the barriers to providing comprehensive teaching on abortion, which include a lack of clinical learning opportunities and a lack of willing teachers with the relevant expertise, as well as a lack of adequate curriculum time. [1]

We have therefore teamed up with Jayne Kavanagh, Associate Professor (Teaching) at UCL Medical School who has been providing well-evaluated, inclusive teaching on abortion for many years, with opt-in clinical placements in local NHS and independent abortion care services. [5] She has offered to work with medical schools to address these barriers by sharing her approach and teaching resources (available online) [6] and training and mentoring local lecturers to deliver teaching, which she has already successfully done at a number of UK medical schools over the last seven years.

We are asking all UK medical schools to dedicate at least the same amount of curriculum time to the clinical aspects as they do to the legal and ethical aspects of abortion, with a minimum of three hours on both. We also recommend that contact is made with Jayne via j.kavanagh@ucl.ac.uk if support to deliver this teaching would be helpful.

We would be grateful if you could respond to this letter, by informing us of the current situation at your medical school regarding the teaching of the clinical aspects of abortion and your plans to improve this if it does not match our recommendations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Ranee Thakar

Ranee Thakar, RCOG President

Janet Barter

Janet Barter, FSRH President

Patricia Lohr

Patricia Lohr, Chair of the British Society of Abortion Care Providers (BSACP)
Education and Training committee

References

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- [5] Cohen, P., Mayhew, J., Gishen, F. *et al*. What should medical students be taught about abortion? An evaluation of student attitudes towards their abortion teaching and their future involvement in abortion care. *BMC Med Educ* **21**, 4 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02414-9>
- [6] Doctors For Choice UK. Education: resources. [Online]. Available at: <https://doctorsforchoiceuk.com/education> [Accessed 18 July 2023]