

Medication Abortion Counseling Model: Key Points

- Discuss pregnancy options and ensure that the decision to have an abortion is informed, voluntary, and uncoerced.
- The goal of abortion education is to give the patient the knowledge they need to make an informed decision about whether to have an abortion and which procedure to choose.
- Compare the considerations and things to know about having a procedural abortion or medication abortion. Explain the differences, timing, basic clinical steps, known side effects, what to expect during the process, and options for follow-up.
- Ask what the patient already knows about abortion. Ask about any previous experience(s) and fears or anxieties.
- Discuss time off from other responsibilities (work, childcare, etc.)
- Discuss the potential teratogenicity of misoprostol and emphasize that once the medicines have been taken, the abortion should be completed either with pills or a procedure.
- Discuss issues of confidentiality and social and physical support.
- Offer anticipatory guidance. Discuss the amount of pain and bleeding associated with the medication abortion process, including possibly experiencing heavy bleeding with clots and passing and seeing products of conception.
- Instruct the patient on the use of all medications including how to use misoprostol vaginally or buccally, and use of pain medication. For those concerned about criminalization, let patients know that vaginal insertion of misoprostol may leave pill fragments that can be detected on a clinician's exam. Buccal and sublingual insertion of pills do not leave pill fragments, and thus may be less likely to trigger criminalization.
- Offer alternative forms of pain management, like using a heating pad/hot water bottle on the abdomen or drinking warm liquids like tea or hot cocoa.
- Be very sensitive to patients who learn they are not eligible for a medication abortion or an abortion in your practice/state. Offer timely referrals, connections with abortion funds and practical support organizations, and information about self-managed abortion as needed or requested.
- Offer contraceptive counseling if the patient desires.
- Review aftercare instructions, including emergency contact information and how to reach the on-call clinician for questions and concerns. Offer a follow-up appointment or phone call.

References:

Breitbart, V. *Counseling for Medication Abortion*. American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. August 2000;183 (2), S26-33.

Counseling Guide for Clinicians Offering Medication Abortion. Planned Parenthood of New York City, Inc. 1996.

Clinical Policy Guidelines for Abortion Care. National Abortion Federation. 2022.