Assessing the availability of abortion care in New Brunswick

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Introduction

In 1988, Canada’s abortion law was decriminalized and abortion is now considered a medically necessary service. However, abortion care remains inaccessible to many Canadian women. Indeed, a study conducted in 2006 found that only 15.9% of Canadian hospitals provide abortion services, a 2% drop from 2003.¹ The lack of hospital availability results in geographic disparities in access, a major barrier to women’s ability to obtain timely and affordable care.

This study builds on these previous efforts and explores the current availability of abortion care in all non-specialized hospitals in New Brunswick.

Methods

- Using publicly available information we identified 18 non-specialized hospitals in New Brunswick
- We contacted each facility by phone to determine if they provide abortion services using two different approaches:
  - The caller identified herself as a researcher from the University of Ottawa
  - The caller posed as a 23-year old woman seeking an abortion using a pre-determined client profile and contacted facilities in both English and French

If YES, we asked questions to determine:
  - The gestational age limit
  - If medication abortion is available
  - If a physician referral is required
  - How long it takes to make an appointment (mystery client only)

If NO, the mystery client asked for information about where to go and then assessed the accuracy and appropriateness of the referral (if provided)

- We evaluated the tone, tenor, and quality of the interactions
- We compared responses received to both approaches
- We mapped the location of providing facilities

Results

Approach #1

- 2/18 hospitals (11%) reported providing abortion care
- 2/18 hospitals (11%) refused to provide the identified researcher with information, in one case citing “confidentiality”
- Researchers received very little information

Approach #2

Providing facilities

- 3/18 hospitals (17%) reported providing abortion care
- All 3 facilities provide to 13 weeks and 6 days
- 1 hospital offers a medication abortion option
- 2 hospitals require a referral from a physician
- All appointments could be scheduled within 2 weeks
- All phone calls took less than 6 minutes
- Interactions were mostly friendly, polite or neutral
- Information given from providing hospitals were the same for both profiles (Francophone and Anglophone)

Non-providing facilities

- 6/15 of non-providing hospitals (40%) appropriately referred the Francophone caller to another facility
- 8/15 of non-providing hospitals (53%) appropriately referred the Anglophone caller to another facility
- Hospitals that appropriately referred the mystery client caller referred her to both the in-province clinic and providing hospitals

Discussion

- Access to abortion care in New Brunswick is limited
- Providing hospitals are concentrated in two communities
- Hospitals provided different information to our researchers and the mystery client
- Some hospitals are giving inaccurate information to women seeking abortion care
- Based on the tone and tenor of the interactions, women seeking abortion care are respected and cared for
- Because non-hospital based abortion care is not covered by provincial health insurance, in-province clinic abortions are expensive
- The integration of mifepristone/misoprostol could potentially expand the access to abortion care

Future Studies

- Assess the integration of mifepristone/misoprostol into hospital based abortion care in New Brunswick
- Assess the availability of abortion care in all non-specialized hospitals in Canada

References


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