Pathways to Abortion Services in South Carolina: Identifying patient-centered perspectives to inform evaluation of Provide, Inc.’s Referrals for Unintended Pregnancy Training Program

Judy Margo, MPH, DrPH(c)  Emily Feinberg, ScD, CNP  Lois McCluskey, DrPH, MPH  Gouri Gupta, PhD, BMS  Melanie Zurek, EdM  Jenny O’Donnell, MSc

**Background**
Provide, Inc. is implementing a Referrals for Unintended Pregnancy Training curriculum in Southern and Midwestern states (including South Carolina) to improve capacity of health and social service providers to offer options counseling and abortion referrals.

The findings from these interviews with abortion patients and staff in South Carolina will inform a patient-centered evaluation of these trainings.

State-level restrictions increasingly imposed on abortion services in the U.S., such as:
- Delayed access to care
- Increased risk of being turned away due to gestational limits
- Increased financial burdens on women
- Overall negative impact on women’s access to full range of reproductive health care

**Objectives**
- To examine how women in South Carolina currently access abortion services
- To understand whether referrals and other measures could increase ease of access
- To make recommendations on patient-centered improvements for provider training
- To utilize findings in creating survey for use with abortion patients

**Methods**

**Data Collection:** 45 semi-structured private interviews with women receiving abortion services; ~10-30 minutes; $40 gift card

**Setting:** 3 freestanding clinics in Charleston, Columbia, Greenville

**Analysis:** Thematic narrative analysis

**Eligibility:** 18+; English language
All eligible patients had opportunity to opt in/out

**Sample Characteristics (n=45)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Patients</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Geographical Setting</th>
<th>Insurance Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>African American (NIH)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Private through Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>White (NIH)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>South Carolina Medicaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>Other (suburban)</td>
<td>No Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private through Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Veterans Benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emerging Themes from Qualitative Interviews with Abortion Patients**

### Knowing where to go for abortion services
- Internet search
- Previous experience
- Referral from friend or family member
- Referral from health professional

### Professional Referrals—Neutral
“The more or less, ‘Good luck with your pregnancy, here’s some information.’ They didn’t go into detail as far as what I was gonna pursue. It was cut and dry, basically.”
23 year old, pregnancy test at health department clinic

### Professional Referrals—Positive
“Oh yeah, I told her [I wanted to have an abortion]. She said, okay, that’s your decision. But if you change your mind, then she told me everything.”
23 year old, pregnancy test at health department clinic

“I went for my yearly check-up with my doctor, and that’s how she let me know [I was pregnant]. I was unsure what I wanted to do, so she talked to me a little bit, and provided me with some options. It wasn’t hard. I think she could tell from my reaction that I didn’t know [what I wanted].”
25 year old, an unexpected positive pregnancy test with doctor

### Professional Referrals—Negative
“After I said, ‘Well maybe I don’t want to keep it,’ he walked out the room. And then he gave me a brochure that somebody had written on “Planned Parenthood” and then he just left. I thought it was rude. You’re a doctor, you’re a professional.”
18 year old, pregnancy test at Urgent Care clinic

“I didn’t expect it was going to be easy but it was a little frustrating that there were so many little passive kind of pushes away from it.”
24 year old, passive test and ultrasound at teaching hospital clinic

**Examples of Barriers to care**
- Others include transportation, scheduling/timing
- Finances
  “The only thing that was tough on me trying to find the money, I actually had to get a loan [of $250]. And a very dear friend of mine sold some of his stuff to help me pay for half of it.”
31 year old describing biggest challenge

**Crisis Pregnancy Centers**
“Those driveways are so close together and they have the same name...I went up to the counter and I told her my name my appointment time, and I’m here for the abortion pill. And she was like, ‘Okay, well can I get your name and your phone number and social security number?’”
33 year old on accidentally going to crisis pregnancy center next door to clinic

**Next Steps**
- Further analyses of qualitative data with patients & clinic staff
- Development of patient-centered recommendations for Provide, Inc. training; patient survey
- Development of white paper

**References**

**Acknowledgements/Contact**
This project is funded by Provide, Inc. Additional support from the Maternal & Child Health Bureau (HRSA) MCH Epidemiology Applied Research Fellowship at BU/SPH (Award 733 MCC/07-15-08). For questions, contact Judy Margo, University of Massachusetts Boston, 1125 Beacon Street, Boston 02115, or jmargo@bu.edu.

**South Carolina**

- Greenville Clinic + CPC driveways

**Image:** CPC clinic, health center, and directions to CPC clinic.