



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

POB 2663, Station Main, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3W3
info@arcc-cdac.ca • www.arcc-cdac.ca • (c/o 604-351-0867)

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For immediate release

New Report Highlights Lack of Respect for Women Seeking Abortions

VANCOUVER — Many health professionals across Canada lack basic information about abortion services, and often act disrespectfully to women seeking abortions, according to a new report that documents poor access to hospital abortion services across Canada.¹ “This report, produced by our colleagues at Canadians for Choice, reveals that even some doctors act unprofessionally towards women asking about abortion services,” said Judy Burwell of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC).

“This report is a must-read for all hospital employees,” said Joyce Arthur, another ARCC spokesperson. “Abortion is a common medical procedure and all hospital staff should know how to refer appropriately.” But according to the report, 41% of hospitals that provide abortion services had staff members answering the phone who didn’t know that abortions were performed there, and couldn’t transfer the caller. Some staff were unwilling to find out any information, while others gave out misinformation or referrals to anti-abortion organizations. Many were also rude or judgmental—some even hung up on the caller, or told them myths about abortion. “At a time when a woman is vulnerable and needs medical help, she needs support and professionalism, not guilt trips or scare-mongering,” said Arthur.

“Health professionals have an obligation to be professional when dealing with the public, regardless of their personal views,” said Burwell. And they need to know where to refer women for accurate abortion information. Women deserve better than this kind of treatment.” The report told stories of women who went to their family

¹ Shaw, Jessica. 2007. *Reality Check: a close look at accessing abortion services in Canadian hospitals*. Canadians for Choice. <http://www.canadiansforchoice.ca/report.html>

doctor to get a referral for an abortion. In one case, when the woman told her doctor she intended to have an abortion, he had her lay on the examining table and placed a stethoscope on her belly. He then pretended to listen to the fetal heartbeat and in rhythm with the beat said, “I love you mommy... I love you mommy...” In other cases, doctors refused to provide any information at all or lied to their patients about how far along they were. One woman didn’t discover the lie until weeks later and then had to leave her home province to find mid-trimester abortion services.

The report highlighted serious access problems in New Brunswick in particular, “New Brunswick has fallen way behind other provinces, with only two hospitals now providing abortions,” said Arthur. “But one of those hospitals couldn’t even give the caller any useful information.” The Morgentaler Clinic in Fredericton now provides the majority of abortions in the province, but Arthur noted, “It’s the only clinic in Canada that receives no public funding, which violates the *Canada Health Act* and women’s constitutional rights.”

“The Canadians for Choice report clearly demonstrates why publicly-funded clinic services are important. Hospitals alone cannot provide for women’s reproductive health needs,” said Burwell. “Today, abortion clinics now perform about 45% of all abortions in Canada, which has really helped improve access in general. But hospitals remain an essential component of abortion access in Canada, especially outside major cities.”

List of Media Contacts

Joyce Arthur	Pro-Choice Action Network, Vancouver	joycearthur@shaw.ca	604-351-0867
Judy Burwell	former director, Morgentaler Clinic, Fredericton	cheznous1@rogers.com	506-470-9049
Carolyn Egan	Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Toronto	c.egan@sympatico.ca	416-806-7985
Catherine Megill (elle parle français)	ARCC-CDAC, Montreal	trustwomen@yahoo.com	514-486-9669
Dr. Suzanne Newman	Medical Director /, Jane's Clinic, Winnipeg	snewman@cc.umanitoba.ca	204-477-1887