

# Access to Pregnancy Termination Services

## An Official Position Statement of The Society For Maternal-Fetal Medicine

### **Position**

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) supports a woman's right to access the full spectrum of reproductive health services, including pregnancy termination. Reproductive health decisions are best made by an informed woman in consultation with her health care provider.

SMFM opposes legislation and policies that limit a woman's ability to access abortion. The Society also opposes policies that compromise the sanctity of the patient-provider relationship by limiting a health care provider's ability to counsel women and/or provide medically appropriate treatment.

### **Background**

Access to safe, evidenced-based, legal reproductive health services is critical to women's overall health.<sup>1</sup> When pregnancy termination services are not legal or are highly restricted, women often resort to dangerous means to ending pregnancies, including self-inflicted trauma, consumption of chemicals, self-medication, and even unqualified and likely unsafe providers of pregnancy termination services.<sup>2,3</sup>

Because maternal-fetal medicine (MFM) physicians primarily provide care to women experiencing high-risk pregnancies, the Society is particularly concerned with access to pregnancy termination services for this population. Women with high-risk pregnancies are more likely to experience medical complications – for themselves, their fetus(es), or both – that can lead to increased maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality. For example, many genetic anomalies render a fetus nonviable and can lead to a loss or stillbirth late in pregnancy.<sup>4</sup> In other instances, the life of the woman may be at risk due to a complicated pregnancy, and abortion may be required to protect a woman's life or health.

Since SMFM and its members are dedicated to optimizing maternal and child outcomes, assuring that medically appropriate options are available is critically important.

### **Rights of Individual Clinicians**

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine asserts that MFM physicians have the professional responsibility to respect women's autonomy in decisions about pregnancy and to provide nonjudgmental care to women, either directly or through appropriate referrals. However, the Society recognizes that some physicians may have religious or moral objections to participating in certain health care services, including pregnancy termination. The Society supports protections afforded under federal law for an individual physician who refuses to participate in an abortion or other health care procedures to which the physician has a moral or religious objection so long as the physician has given appropriate notice to his or her employer.

In the event an MFM physician has a religious or moral reason for not providing abortion or other legal reproductive health services, the physician has a professional responsibility to provide timely referrals to his or her patients who request or require such care.

While SMFM recognizes that support for or opposition to pregnancy termination services is a personal matter and respects the need for its members to determine their individual positions, as an organization, SMFM supports pregnancy termination as a valuable health care service and opposes legislation and policies that limit its access to women, especially those experiencing high-risk pregnancies.

### **References**

1. Increasing access to abortion. Committee Opinion No. 613. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2014; 124: 1060-5.
2. World Health Organization. *Unsafe abortion: global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2008*. 6th ed. Geneva: WHO; 2011. Available at: [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501118\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501118_eng.pdf?ua=1). Retrieved April 24, 2017.
3. Guttmacher Institute. *Facts on induced abortion worldwide*. New York (NY): GI; 2012. Available at: [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_IAW.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html). Retrieved April 24, 2017.
4. American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Indiana Section. Letter to the Honorable Mike Pence. Available at: [http://www.acog.org/About\\_ACOG/ACOG\\_Departments/Government\\_Relations\\_and\\_Outreach/~/\\_media/Departments/Government%20Relations%20and%20Outreach/20160310PenceLtr.pdf](http://www.acog.org/About_ACOG/ACOG_Departments/Government_Relations_and_Outreach/~/_media/Departments/Government%20Relations%20and%20Outreach/20160310PenceLtr.pdf). Retrieved April 24, 2017.

**Approved by the Board of Directors**  
December 2017