



# *College Statement of Policy*

As issued by the College Executive Board

## **ABORTION POLICY**

The following statement is the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) general policy related to abortion. The College's clinical guidelines related to abortion and additional information are contained in the relevant Practice Bulletins, Committee Opinions, and other College documents.

Induced abortion is an essential component of women's health care. Like all medical matters, decisions regarding abortion should be made by patients in consultation with their health care providers and without undue interference by outside parties. Like all patients, women obtaining abortion are entitled to privacy, dignity, respect, and support.

The College continues to affirm the legal right of a woman to obtain an abortion prior to fetal viability. ACOG is opposed to abortion of the healthy fetus that has attained viability in a healthy woman. Viability is the capacity of the fetus for sustained survival outside the woman's uterus. Whether or not this capacity exists is a medical determination, may vary with each pregnancy and is a matter for the judgment of the responsible health care provider.

While ACOG recognizes and respects that individuals may be personally opposed to abortion, health care providers should not seek to impose their personal beliefs upon their patients nor allow personal beliefs to compromise patient health, access to care, or informed consent.

Informed consent is an expression of respect for the patient as a person; it particularly respects a patient's moral right to bodily integrity, to self-determination regarding sexuality and reproductive capacities, and to the support of the patient's freedom within caring relationships.

A pregnant woman who may be ambivalent about her pregnancy should be fully informed in a balanced manner about all options, including raising the child herself, placing the child for adoption, and abortion. The information conveyed should be appropriate to the duration of the pregnancy. There is an ethical obligation to provide accurate information that is required for the patient to make a fully informed decision. The professional must avoid introducing personal bias.

Medical knowledge and patient care are not static. Innovations in medical practice are critical to the advancement of medicine and the improvement of health. Medical research is the foundation of evidence-based medicine and new research leads to improvements in care. ACOG is opposed to laws and regulations that operate to prevent advancements in medicine. For example, laws that prohibit health care providers from following current evidence-based protocols for medical abortion disregard scientific progress and prevent providers from offering patients the best available care. Likewise, the state and federal laws that prohibit specific surgical abortion procedures disrupt the evolution of surgical technique and prevent physicians from providing the best or most appropriate care for some patients.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

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If abortion is to be performed, it should be performed safely and as early as possible. ACOG supports access to care for all individuals, irrespective of financial status, and supports the availability of all reproductive options. ACOG opposes unnecessary regulations that limit or delay access to care. The intervention of legislative bodies into medical decision making is inappropriate, ill advised, and dangerous.

ACOG opposes the harassment of abortion providers and patients.

ACOG strongly supports those activities which prevent unintended pregnancy.

### Approval by the Executive Board

General policy: January 1993

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Combined and reaffirmed: September 2000

Reaffirmed: July 2004

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