

Medication Abortion

French child prodigy, inventor, and Catholic philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, "Evil is easy, and has infinite forms."

My twenty-something self was still far from convinced that abortion was evil. I was most definitely in the market for a fix of the quick and easy variety. For the second time, I found myself faced with an unintended and quite unwelcome pregnancy.

I was eight weeks along, and the father was my husband, whom I was in the process of divorcing. The years I had spent with him and the way I had seen him parent, or fail to parent, his existing children from a previous relationship was enough to convince me that I simply could not, would not, bear this man's child.

Considering that I was a clinic volunteer at the time, radically supported the cause, and had surrounded myself with abortion-minded people, I played no mental ping-pong regarding my decision to terminate the pregnancy. More time was spent deliberating my abortion options.

A few years prior I'd had a surgical abortion. Although I had no complications with that procedure, I'd heard much about medication abortion and I was intrigued. Something about it seemed holistic in nature, noninvasive, and private. There were no stirrups or speculums to be endured. And the best part was that the entire process could take place within the confines of my very own home, on my schedule and with my dignity fully intact.

If that wasn't progress in feminism, well, I certainly didn't know what was. After effortlessly filling out some paperwork and going for some basic lab tests and an ultrasound, I was tucked into a room for my obligatory pre-abortion chat. I had brought a friend with me, but support persons are never permitted past the waiting room and I was forced to wait alone. My pre-abortion "counseling" session is forever etched into my mind with the detail and permanence of the presidents' heads on Mount Rushmore.

"You will have some heavy bleeding and period-like cramps," the worker assured me. "None of it should last too long, and you should be back to normal in a couple of days."

"Sounds good," I remember saying.

The Walls Are Talking: Former Abortion Clinic Workers Tell Their Stories

By Abby Johnson with Kristin Detrow

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And it did. A couple of pills, a heavy period, and in only a few days' time I'd be good as new. If there were any risks or side effects to these miracle drugs, she had never mentioned them with me. As a young and idealistic abortion-advocate recruit, I fully trusted that they had my best interest at heart. If there was pertinent information about these drugs that I needed to know, they would have fallen all over themselves to provide it. That was why we existed, after all, to be of service to women in crisis.

With confidence, I traded my four hundred dollars in cash for a mifepristone (Mifeprex) pill and a brown bag of medication to take home. As promised, I suffered no ill side effects from the first pill; in fact, I felt great.

The next day I was an obedient patient who meticulously followed orders. After eating a light lunch, I took the medication from my brown bag, four pills called misoprostol. I had been warned that these pills would start my bleeding and cramping probably within an hour, but that it wouldn't be intolerable and that an ibuprofen or two would easily manage the discomfort.

I fashioned a cozy nest for myself in my bed and flipped on the TV, intent on enduring this minor physical trial like a trooper. As I channel surfed, I attempted to disregard the emotional ramifications of what I was about to do -- in fact, what I had already done by swallowing those tablets. In ten minutes' time, I didn't need the assistance of the television or remote control to distract me.

Suddenly, I was blindsided by a pain in my abdomen like nothing I had ever experienced before or since. Then came the blood in a proverbial tidal wave. Somehow, I managed to hobble to the bathroom; the agony compounded with every step. The rush of blood was terrifying and unrelenting. Even the sturdiest of pads was powerless to absorb the flow.

All I could do was sit on the toilet, convinced that I was bleeding out. Intense pain would rack my stomach, and then lessen a bit. But the bleeding was constant. My misery was multiplied when the nausea hit. There I was, profusely bleeding into the toilet while vomiting into my bathroom trashcan. In between the flushing and heaving, I wept. Sweat literally poured out of me. This type of sweating, medically referred to as diaphoresis, has nothing to do with temperature. It is a result of excruciating pain.

After several hours on the toilet, I forced myself to feel cautiously hopeful that I might survive after all. I was weak, drenched with sweat and blood, and desperately wanted to take a bath. I continued to long for respite from the relentless cramps, and I was

optimistic that the warm water might help. If nothing else, it would wash away the stench of the last few hours. My hair was matted with sweat and vomit. My legs were covered with a mixture of sweat and vomit mingled with blood.

I tentatively tried my legs and thankfully they cooperated. Exhausted and spent, I crept into my tub. The cramps continued to come in waves, but the warm water did seem to have a dulling effect on them. Grateful, I closed my eyes and rested my head on the edge of the tub. *Please, God*, I silently prayed. *Please let it be over*. In my weakened and fatigued state, I mercifully drifted into a semiconsciousness for a few minutes.

A fresh round of cramps forced me back to reality. My eyes snapped open, and what I saw horrified me. I lay frozen for a few seconds, my brain refusing to accept what I saw. My bathwater had turned to blood. I was lying in a crime scene. The metallic scent hit my nostrils and brought a new wave of nausea.

I knew one thing for certain. I had to get out of that tub. I had to wash the blood off me. The horrific sight brought a surge of adrenaline to my weary body as I stood. I trembled and shook, and suddenly the effects of the adrenaline left as soon as it had come, leaving me faint. Again, I broke out in a cold sweat. Sobbing, I clung to the shower walls, intent on remaining vertical. I was utterly terrified of being immersed again in the gory mess at my feet.

At that point, I felt something break loose within me, and there was a splash in the bloody water draining out of the tub. I steadied myself and bent down to determine what in the world had come out of me. It was a blood clot the size of a lemon. I stared in disbelief. Was this my baby?

I didn't want to look at it. I just wanted it to be gone. With a clot that size, there was no way it was simply going to swirl down the drain. Using both hands, I was able to trap the clot and move it to the toilet. The majority of the mess had since drained, and I stood in the shower for a few minutes. The cramps didn't seem quite as intense.

The thought that this nightmare was finally over had no more than crossed my mind when I was struck with another excruciating pain in my abdomen. Doubled over, I yanked the curtain, fumbled out of the shower, and sat back onto the toilet. I passed another lemon-sized clot. And another, and another.

It was around midnight. I had been in agony in my bathroom for the better part of twelve hours. Still, the bleeding was far too intense even to consider returning to my bed.

The clots had stopped passing with such rapid succession, but they continued to come nonetheless.

Eventually, the bleeding became more manageable and the clots ceased. Still, I didn't feel safe leaving the bathroom. I spent the night curled up on the bathroom floor. The cold tile felt good on my sweat-drenched face and body. Though I had never experienced exhaustion on such a level, sleep stubbornly refused to come. As I lay there, it occurred to me that this was the way I was going to die. I wondered who would find me. I prayed that it wouldn't be my mother.

This couldn't be normal, I thought. I must be having some bizarre and extremely rare reaction to either mifepristone or misoprostol. After all, what I had experienced was a far cry from the "heavy bleeding and period-like cramps" that I was cautioned against. I decided that if I lived through the nights, I would call the clinic first thing in the morning. Surely, they would want to examine me right away -- or to be on the safe side, insist that I rush to the nearest emergency room.

You can imagine my surprise when the nurse returned my call the next day. Anxiously, I poured out the gruesome details of my ordeal and awaited her instructions.

"That's not abnormal," she said, barely disguising her disinterest.

"Not normal?" I seethed. The clotting, the pain, the insane amount of bleeding -- she could not be serious.

"Use a heating pad, soak in a warm tub, and take some ibuprofen."

It was a good thing for this woman that she was safely out of my grasp. I was fuming, and she was poking the cobra. More than anything, I felt betrayed. The organization that I had given so much of myself to had completely failed to protect me.

I now look back on the tonsillectomy I had in 2009. The risks, benefits, and possible complications of the procedure had been explained to me ad nauseum during my pre-op visit with the ENT. Although he confidently assured me that such complications were extremely rare, he rattled off the list of possibilities nonetheless: severing of vocal cords resulting in tongue damage -- even death. The contrast between this visit and my pre-abortion "counseling" session at the clinic was striking.

I remember thinking that my ENT expounding on all the potential risks was total overkill. However, after giving it some thought, I was grateful that I was aware. I was informed. I had the *choice* to back out. Had I awoken having lost my ability to speak or with teeth busted out, I would have at least recognized in advance that it was a possibility.

Although the lion's share of my nightmare with my mifepristone/misoprostol abortion occurred that awful night, it was a full eight weeks until my symptoms finally abated -- eight weeks of blood clots; eight weeks of excruciating cramps; eight weeks of nausea.

In the end, my vitriol was no longer aimed at the clinic who had provided me with the medication, but at myself. Self-reproach and guilt consumed me -- guilt that although I had endured an extremely harrowing physical ordeal, the ugly truth of the matter was that I was relieved that I was no longer pregnant.

After my eight-week reprieve, I resumed my role as a clinic volunteer. I vowed to do everything within my power never to let another woman go through what I had. When I advanced from volunteer to full-time staff at the clinic, I made it my personal mission to dissuade women from choosing this "natural" abortion method. I shared my story with them. My hatred of medication abortion became a joke around the clinic.

"Don't let her see the MAB [medical abortion] patients," my coworkers would banter. "They'll all choose surgical abortions, and we'll end up being here all day."

I didn't care. I knew it wasn't good for women. I knew that there was nothing natural about it. I was deeply troubled that this was being pushed on our patients. Never one to shy away from sharing my opinion, particularly pertaining to topics that I felt passionately about, I voiced my objections at a management meeting.

"Why aren't we telling women the risks?" I wanted to know.

My supervisor's answer mortified me. "We don't want to scare them."

"Scare them," I retorted. "Aren't they going to be scared when they think they're dying from the crazy amount of blood they're losing?"

After all, isn't the abortion spin machine constantly going on about how they "trust women"? Women have died from medication abortion. Thousands of women, myself included, have suffered serious complications. If they truly trusted women, wouldn't they

do everything in their power to provide them with all the facts needed to make the right choice? Didn't they think that women were intelligent enough to make decisions regarding their bodies if they were presented with all the facts? Where was the female empowerment that I'd heard so much about at abortion-advocate rallies?

My protests were unappreciated and fell on deaf ears. Incapable of changing the powers that be, I settled for doing my part to prevent the women I personally counseled against this abortion method.

I now understand that the abortion industry is not concerned that women will be "scared." They are the ones who are scared -- scared that if women did get accurate information and were aware of the risks of the lethal options on their malevolent menu, they would walk right out the door; and terrified that they would consider choosing life for their children. Every woman who walks out of the clinic and chooses life for her child equates to lost revenue.

When it comes to abortion providers, it's all about the Benjamins. Cold, hard cash will always be their bottom line. Since its approval by the Food and Drug Administration in September of 2000, clinics have encouraged an increasing number of women to choose mifepristone and misoprostol to terminate their pregnancies.

Is the abortion industry aware of the risks? Yes. Do they know that women are dying each year from medication abortions? Yes. So why would they continue to advocate for this unsafe concoction while withholding the facts from women during their bogus counseling sessions?

Blaise Pascal understood why: "Evil is easy, and has infinite forms." Abortion is evil, and from a clinic's standpoint, medication abortion is easy. It's far less labor-intensive and time-consuming than surgical abortions, and it's highly profitable. Unfortunately, the road is not an easy one for the desperate and vulnerable women who are duped, misled, and outright lied to concerning this toxic mix.

Even when the drugs do terminate a pregnancy without the nightmarish complications that I and numerous others have suffered, the end result is a child's death, a reality that haunts many women throughout their entire lives. Having myself opted for both a surgical and medication abortion in addition to assisting countless women do the same, I can attest to the fact that living with that truth is anything but easy.