

Developing a tool to document obstruction experiences along the abortion care pathway

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Background:

Despite the decriminalisation of abortion in Australia, equitable access to abortion care is not a reality. There are numerous barriers to access, including obstruction of care in the health system. Obstruction includes not referring to a willing provider, active dissuasion, making abortion seekers feel guilty, providing misinformation, and attempts to delay access. While we know that health practitioners do not always comply with their legal and professional obligations to facilitate abortion access and refer for care, we lack evidence about the patterns and nature of obstruction. This project aims to capture and analyse data about abortion obstruction through an anonymous online reporting tool with healthcare workers in Victoria.

Methods:

We adapted a tool used to capture the harms of abortion bans in the United States. A one-month pilot of the tool was followed by a survey or interview (per participant preference) to evaluate usability, feasibility, and potential for scale-up of the tool. Healthcare workers (e.g., nurses, doctors, allied health, call centre staff, pharmacists) were eligible to participate if they interact with abortion seekers in their role.

Results:

We report findings from a one-month pilot of the tool in Victoria with participants working across service delivery modalities. Participants were able to successfully complete the online tool for patients who described any obstruction on their pathway to abortion care. The tool collected anonymised data about the nature of the obstruction, its impact, where it occurred, and length of delay. Participants used the online evaluation to suggest adjustments before wider implementation. This presentation will report on the pilot results.

Conclusion:

Our tool has the potential to document the nature and geographic patterns of obstructive behaviours in relation to abortion access. This new evidence can inform advocacy for policy and health system interventions to minimise obstruction and ensure equitable access to abortion.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

We have no interests to disclose.

