Meeting the Challenge of Abortion as a Topic in Medical Education

Julia Frank MD, Seema Karak MD, Gisela Butera MLIS, Maria Jarkowiec MD, Suzanne Gouda MD
The George Washington University, School of Medicine and Health Sciences

BACKGROUND

- Abortions typically occur outside of academic medical centers, in a highly politicized context.
- As adult learners, students may have well formed beliefs about abortion. Few schools address the subject in the clinical years and even fewer in the pre-clinical years. Fulfilling the APGO mandate to provide abortion education requires the development of innovative approaches.

METHODS

- Since 2005, our longitudinal, small group, PBL curriculum has included several weeks devoted to unplanned pregnancy in a late adolescent girl. The case objectives cover medical issues, obstetric procedures, patient decision making, and social consequences of pregnancy. Since 2012, we have included a framing lecture on legal, ethical, and political issues in reproductive health care. In 2013 and 2014, we added examples of women considering abortion in different circumstances.
- In 2012 we introduced a monitored online forum that permitted anonymous posts. Students posted comments about the PBL case(s). After obtaining IRB approval, we conducted three annual surveys, and held one focus group per year for students who had completed their OB/GYN clerkship. We analyzed the survey responses quantitatively, supplemented by qualitative, thematic analysis of the online comments and the focus groups.

ETHICS LECTURE – CLICKER QUESTION EXAMPLE

Is there a difference between discarding an embryo which carries a fatal disease and aborting a fetus for similar reasons?"