

Early medical abortion - available but not offered in Bulgaria

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What will be discussed:

- Short history of abortion in Bulgaria
- Number of abortions performed
- The law
- Medical abortion availability
- Medical abortion drugs availability
- Introducing changes

History of abortion in Bulgaria

- 1956 – allowed on request up to 12 weeks
- 1968 – 1990 restrictions on abortion to increase population growth:
 - not to women without children (unless > 45 years old)
 - women with 1 or 2 children require permission by a committee of gynaecologist, social worker, lawyer, representative of the 'Alliance of Bulgarian women'
 - allowed to women with 3 or more children, if up to 10 weeks of gestation and if 6 months have elapsed after a previous abortion
- 1990 – current law for abortion
 - allowed on request up to 12 weeks
 - allowed for medical reason up to 20 weeks (list of acceptable indications) and beyond (= at any gestation) for gross foetal anomalies or to save the life of the woman

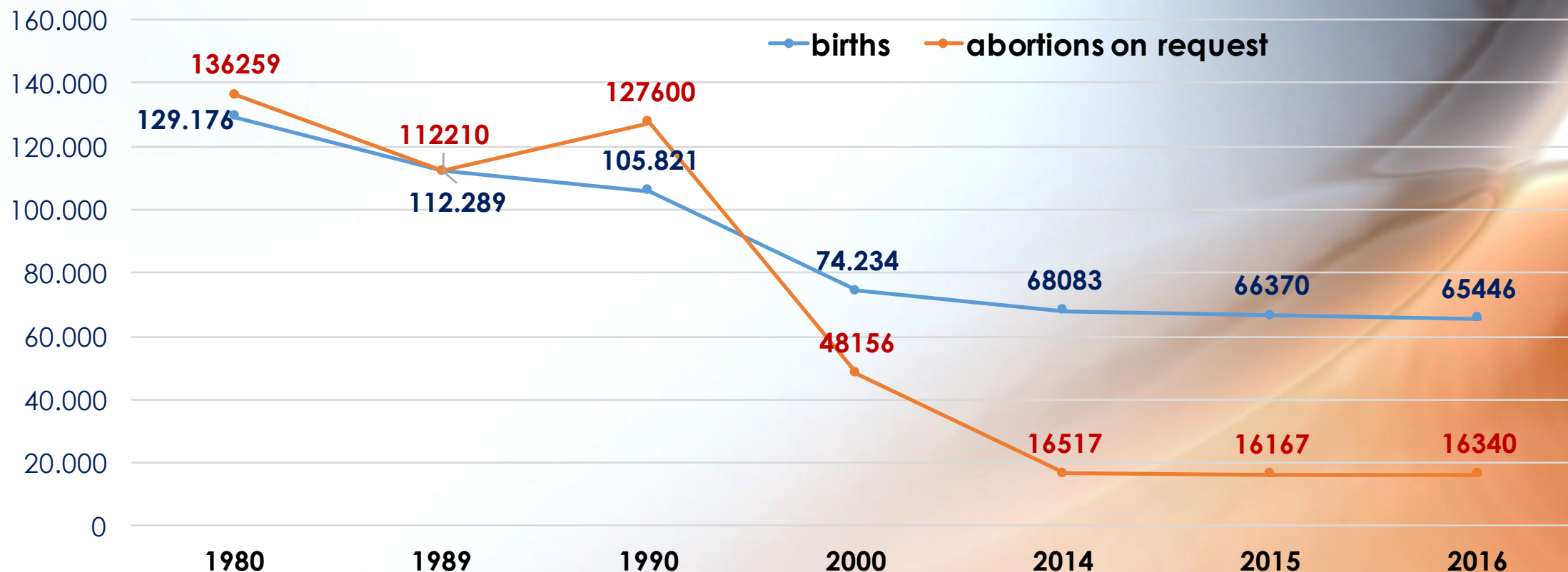
History of abortion in Bulgaria

Abortion is the most popular mean of family planning!

No abortion stigma.

Contraception is scarce.

Performed abortions per year

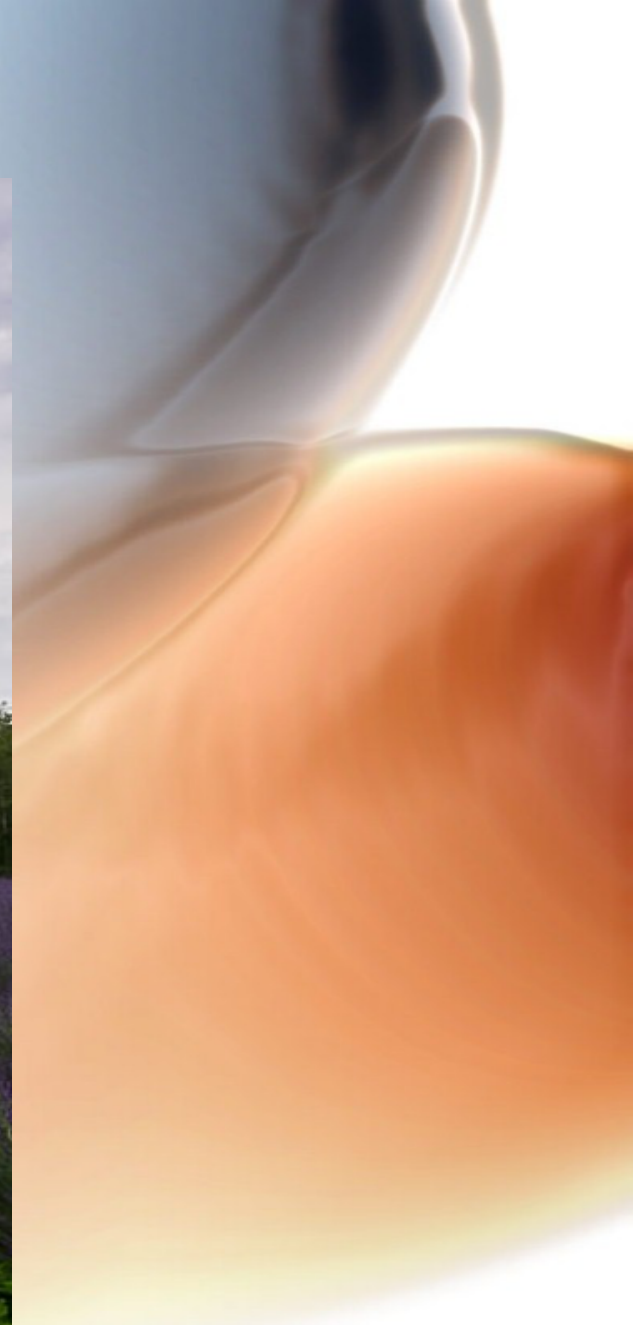


- Up to 1989 - Free medical care, with strict regulations and no private practise - all abortions are registered
- After 1989 - Abortions are no longer covered by state funding, they continue to be provided in state hospitals but for a fee (ERPC for miscarriage is state funded)
- Decline in public health organisation, provision and data collection after 1989

Legal requirements to execute an abortion up to 12 weeks

- **Tests:** Full blood count, urine sample, blood group, Rh factor, clotting screen, vaginal microscopy
- **Place:** Hospital or clinic with registered beds for short term observation and treatment of patients (not an office)
- **Personnel:** Specialist in Obs&Gynae with provided local or general anaesthesia
- Abortion **started** or **completed** outside of clinical facilities or not in accordance with accepted standards is considered criminal (punishable by up to 5 years of imprisonment)

How to do early medical abortion?



Legal requirements in the prospective of medical abortion provision

- **Tests:** FBC, urine sample, blood group, Rh factor, clotting screen, vaginal microscopy – **only Rhesus factor and Haemoglobin are needed**
- **Place:** Hospital or clinic with registered beds for short term observation and treatment of patients – **hospital bed is not required**
- **Personnel:** Specialist in Obs&Gynae with provided local or general anaesthesia
- **continuous presence of an Obs&Gynae is not necessary**
- Abortion **started** or **completed** outside of clinical facilities or not in accordance with accepted standards is considered criminal and is prosecuted by law (punishable by up to 5 years of imprisonment) – **!!!**

In reality..

- Prescriptions are given in offices and various settings.
- No registration of the procedure (not registered = not done)
- No control
- No guidance/protocol/standard
- Fear of complications leading to very low threshold for surgical interventions
 - evacuation of retained products of conception
- Relatively small number of procedures performed by individual doctors per year
 - hard to differentiate between variation of the norm and complication

	Obstetricians & Gynaecologists	Population	Area
Bulgaria	1447	7.12 million	110,994 km ² (42,855 sq mi)
UK	1835	65.64 million	242,495 km ² (93,628 sq mi)

Doctors attitude toward medical abortion

- Varies on experience, knowledge and attitude towards novelties
- Many believe surgery is safer/easier and do NOT offer other methods
- General knowledge is less than satisfactory
 - Abortion is thought to be an easy procedure that can be done by anyone and there is no need to change practice or educate further
- Fear it will reduce doctors' income
 - tablets are sold in the pharmacies

The Patient

- Knowledgeable (internet, word of mouth, friends abroad)
- Want to have tablets and abort at home
- Wants to avoid anaesthesia
- Patient web forums (BG-MAMA):
medical abortion – my personal experience
- created in Oct. 2015, 24 pages, 73 800 views, 348 posts.
Experiences go back to 2009.

Medical abortion drugs availability in Bulgaria

DRUG	REGISTRATION WITH NATIONAL DRUG AGENCY	AVAILABILITY ON THE MARKET
CYTOTEC	✓ 30 tab for 12.5€ 0.42€ per tab	Unavailable/ Never marketed in Bulgaria
Combined MIFEPRISTONE + MISOPROSTOL	JULY 2012	Unavailable/ Never marketed in Bulgaria
MIFEPRISTONE 3 X 200 mg in a pack	DECEMBER 2012	OCT 2014 22€ per tablet
MIFEPRISTONE 1 x 200 mg	OCTOBER 2013	MAY 2014 27€
MISOPROSTOL 400 mcg tab	OCTOBER 2013	JAN 2015 2.80€

Registered for distribution by prescription in pharmacies.

Pharmacists' attitude

Demand is small to keep constant supply

Price is high

Shelf life is relatively short

One Mifepristone product has 3 tablets

Misoprostol is produced and sold in packages of 16 tablets
x 400mcg

Pharmacists are reluctant to break the packaging

Because of this, in reality, tablets are only found in a limited number of pharmacies.

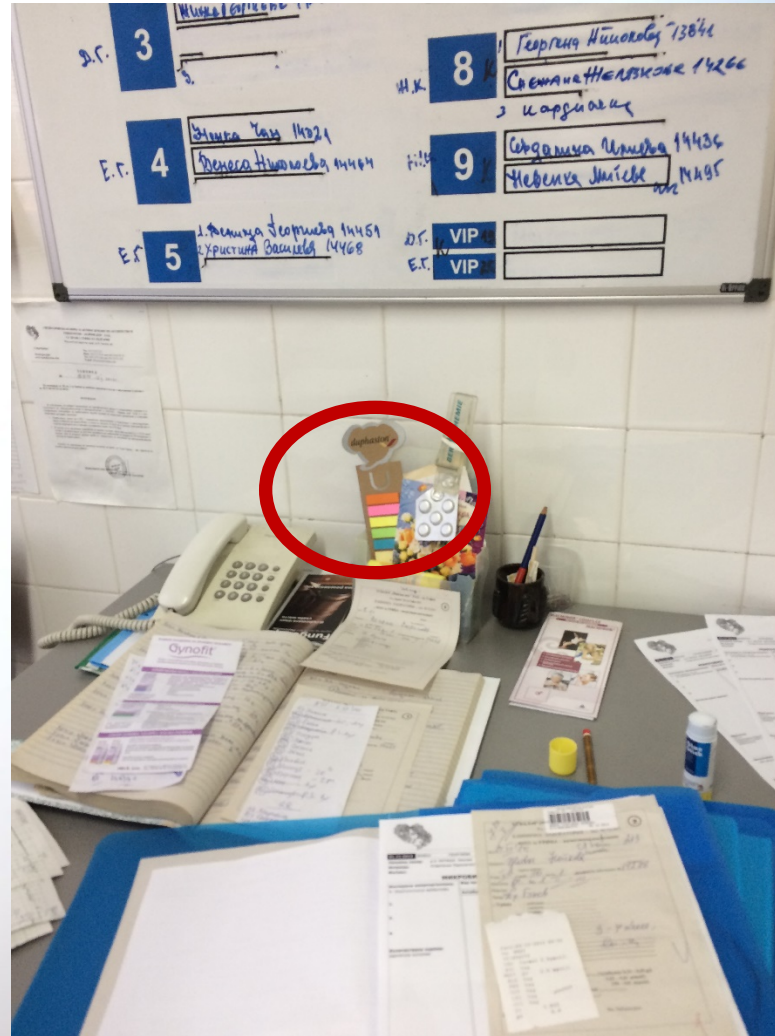
Misoprostol and Mifepristone sales



Cytotec

- Still largely used in the country
- Bought from neighbouring countries (Greece, Turkey)

“the deadly pill...”
(from the national press)



Widespread believes...

Surgical abortion is the gold standard.

Textbook quote:

sharp

“A pregnancy must end with delivery or curettage!”

Availability of early medical abortion in hospitals

Clinical facility	Medical abortion	Surgical abortion
Sofia, I Specialized State Hospital for Obs&Gynae, St Sofia	Not available	100 € + 40 € US; 25 € – tetst for syphilis, hiv, hep B
Sofia, II Specialized State Hospital for Obs&Gynae, Sheinovo	+16 €bloods; 20 € ultrasound	175 € 75 €
Sofia, General Hospital “Hope”		225 €
Sofia, Obs&Gynae Hospital Shterev	Not available	233 €
Sofia, St. Lazar	Not available	365 €
Sofia, St Sofia	Not available	200 €
Sofia, Ajibadem clinic		150 € 100 €
Sofia, Specialized State Hospital for Obs&Gynae, Maichin dom	Not available	
Sofia, IVF Private Clinic		195 € 195 €
Plovdiv, Selena, private hospital	Consultation and prescription 25 €	150 € 50 € blood + consultatio
Plovdiv, General County Hospital, bs&Gynae department	Not aware of such method	63 € Blood test– blood group, full blood count, clotting screen, fibrinogen, urine, syphilis, blood sugar Gown, sleepers, bedding
Burgas, Prvate university Hspital – Vrgin Mary	Not available	125 €+ consultation 25 €
Burgas, Burgasmed – private general hospital	Only the doctor can decide and tell	125 €+ consultation 25 €

Survey between Gynaecologists

The place of medical abortion in clinical practise

- 100 doctors were asked to fill in an anonymous survey – ONLY 20 AGREED TO DO SO

Do you think medical abortion is a successful way to terminate a pregnancy?

17 – Yes; **2 – May be**; 1 blank

Do you offer medical abortion to your patients seeking termination of pregnancy?

16 – Yes; **2 – No** ; 2 blank

Are you aware of the medications used for medical abortion?

17 – Yes; 2 – No; 1 blank **ONLY 4 STATED NAMES OF DRUGS**

Has it ever been necessary to do surgical evacuation of retained products of conception after a medical abortion?

12 – Yes; 6 – No; 2 blank

How many medical abortion have you performed in 2017?

12 - <10; 1 – 10-30; 5 - >30 2 blank

What is the total number of abortions you have performed in 2017?

5 - <10; 4 – 10-30; 7 – 30-50; 5 - >50 2 blank

Would you like to know more about medical abortion?

13 – Yes; **3 – No**; 4 blank

Do you think if you knew more about the method you would offer it to more women?

14 – Yes; **6 – No**

Do you think the method should be popularized?

19 – Yes; **1 – No**

Do you see any obstacles to popularize the method?

11 – Yes (Law -4; difficult to get medication -1; clinical trials are needed - 1) ;
8 – No; 1 blank

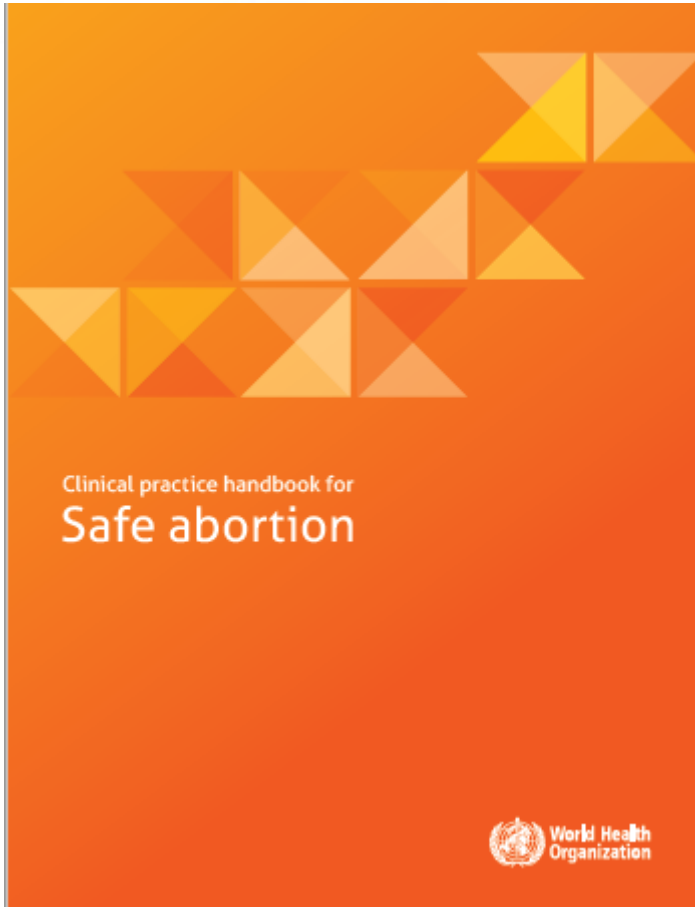


If a woman is given the option to have an abortion, she should be given the option to chose a method!

Introducing changes

- 29.06.2015 - Symposium 'Abortion in XXI century"
- 13.02.2016 – WORKSHOP ON MEDICAL ABORTION
- 01.04 2017 – FIAPAC REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Spreading the knowledge



- WHO Clinical practise handbook for safe abortion
- Translated in Bulgarian published in March 2017



Challenging the status quo

- Protocol for medical abortion published in Bulgarian Journal for Obstetrics and Gynaecology 6 November 2015
- Proposal for changes in the Abortion law to the Ministry of Health
 - response from the National Consultant for Obs&Gynae:
“..not a safe method, not enough experience in the country, tablets should be restricted from the current free access in pharmacies..”



..the path to contemporary
safe abortion



Thank you for
your attention!