

## Where do we, As Doctors, Stand on the Subject of Abortion in Relation to Contemporary Medicine and the Hippocratic Oath?

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**ABSTRACT:** Abortion is a medical procedure used to end a pregnancy. It is widely recognized as a contentious issue in society due to a variety of religious, moral, and ethical considerations. Though it has been prohibited throughout history as an illegal act, it is now a part of the healthcare system that almost all women have access to. It is a mutual decision between the patient and the physician because it affects reproductive health and fertility. When applying for an abortion, the patient must be informed about the procedure and the risks involved, and the physician must obtain women's informed consent. However, not only patients have access to this right; if a physician is morally opposed to performing or assisting in this act, he has the right to simply refrain from performing or assisting in this act and arrange for consultation with other colleagues.

**KEYWORDS:** abortion, modern medicine, Hippocratic Oath, legal act.

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### INTRODUCTION

Abortion is one of the most common procedures performed on women, primarily in the first trimester, to terminate their pregnancies [1], due to either maternal factors or foetal indications such as genetic or structural abnormalities [2]. Abortion can be spontaneous, also known as miscarriage, or induced, which means it is done on purpose. When it is induced, however, abortion can be medical, meaning that it is completed with medications and drugs such as mifepristone and repeated doses of misoprostol, or methotrexate administration in addition to other regimens [3], and it is perceived as more "natural" than a surgical abortion, which is usually performed with special equipment [4]. In today's world or modern medicine, abortion has become a decision made by the patient and family with the guidance of the treating physician, regardless of whether there were any medical indications for it or not. It is regarded as an act involving women's personal choices and preferences, as well as family organization or planning [5]. Despite being a legal act, abortion remains stigmatized due to the serious sociocultural and religious issues that it may address [6]. As a result, healthcare professionals have begun to work toward normalizing abortion as part of routine medical care [7]. However, where do doctors stand between the normalization of abortion in modern medicine and the Hippocratic Oath? The Hippocratic Oath is well-known as an ethical code that doctors have used throughout the years as a standard for professional conduct and behaviour. In the oath, physicians promise not to cause injury or provide lethal medication, to respect patients' privacy, and to live a commendable personal and professional life [8]. Furthermore, the Hippocratic oath encompasses other concepts such as compassion, honesty, confidentiality, thankfulness, and respect for human dignity, as well as prohibitions on euthanasia, sexual interactions with patients, and abortion [9]. These regulations make it obvious that physicians are surrounded by specific ethical norms and moral ideals that supersede the individual judgment of the practitioner. However, do doctors practicing today's medicine adhere to any ethical rules or laws, or is the Hippocratic oath now a crucial medical principle?

### DISCUSSION

Abortion is a medical term that refers to the termination of a pregnancy. It can occur spontaneously, before twenty weeks of gestation, and is known as miscarriage [10], or on purpose, when the pregnancy is primarily unwanted or unintended [11]. Induced abortions can be performed surgically in the first trimester, using a manual or electric vacuum aspiration device, or with medication, and both methods are considered safe and reliable [12]. Abortion was legally restricted or prohibited in almost every country by the end of the nineteenth century, because it was considered a sin or a form of indiscretion, as well as a dangerous procedure that endangered women's health and caused injury or death [13]. All through history, abortion has been considered a criminal act because it violated professional confidentiality and human rights [14], and has been referred to as criminal termination of pregnancy, illegal termination of pregnancy, or illegal abortion [15]. Fearless, women continued to break the law, exposing themselves to significant physical and social risk, either by actively terminating the pregnancy themselves using sharp objects like knives and catheters or by

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seeking out an abortionist who would perform medical interventions to end the pregnancy, and which ultimately resulted to condemnation of both the abortionist and women [16]. The complication rates of illegal abortion, which were particularly related to unsafe and ineffective methods and were putting women in real danger of sepsis, gangrene, and mortality, prompted the passage of laws legalizing abortion in 1973 in order to protect women's lives and avoid disability [17]. Later, legal systems began to permit abortion for a variety of maternal reasons, such as mental illness, psychological stress, mental anguish, and conditions like severe foetal impairment and genetic abnormalities.

However, in today's medicine, abortion has been decriminalized, and almost every woman has access to abortion under the supervision of her healthcare provider [18]. Even if there were no serious genetic or structural abnormalities, or any common reason for a medical termination during pregnancy, abortion can be performed at the patient's request, as it is seen as a personal decision and no longer a legal debate. In today's modern world, women typically intend to terminate their pregnancies due to a lack of childbearing motivation, the presence of other socioeconomic factors, a lack of partner support, and an unwillingness to transition to motherhood, all of which influence abortion demand [19, 20]. Nowadays, abortion is viewed as a method of fertility control and one of a woman's rights to control her own body, as no one can force her to carry in her womb and give birth to an unwanted child. As a result, abortion was legalized for any reason up to 12 weeks of gestation [21], and physicians are required to perform all socially approved medical services, including abortion, after informing patients about its benefits and risks.

However, how does the Hippocratic Oath perceive this act? It is clear that the Hippocratic Oath forbade or prohibited abortion because it was considered a non-human act or a crime against humanity: *I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion. With purity and holiness I will pass my life and practice my Art* [22]. Although all physicians take the oath upon graduating from medical school and swear to uphold its medical ideals in their daily lives, they do not believe it is relevant to modern medicine. As a result, the Hippocratic oath has been modernized in such a way that it can assist in resolving modern issues while not being considered a gold standard for medical practice [9]. When the Hippocratic oath was written, it did not take into account vegetative states or patients' rights to live with dignity and make their own decisions about their health and treatment strategy; as a result, the harmony between patient and physician was disrupted due to these limitations and restrictions [23], which eventually led to a review of the Oath following World War II, during the Nuremberg trial, and new ethical principles [24]. The fact that there is no prohibition against abortion in the modern, updated version of the Oath is noteworthy. As a result, abortion has become a decision that must be made by both the patient and the doctor. The doctor must obtain the patient's informed consent after fully disclosing all relevant risks of the treatment, including mortality, morbidity, and psychological and psychiatric side effects [25]. Notwithstanding, if the physician believes that the act of abortion violates his morals and beliefs, he has the right to refuse to treat the patient or refer her to another specialist [26]. What is the viewpoint of a Muslim physician on abortion?

It is common knowledge that Muslim doctors rely on ethics obtained from Islamic law and principles derived primarily from the Qur'an [27]: *That is why We ordained for the Children of Israel that whoever takes a life—unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land—it will be as if they killed all of humanity; and whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity. Although Our messengers already came to them with clear proofs, many of them still transgressed afterwards through the land, surah al Maida Verses (Q5:32-33)*. It is obvious that in Islam, foetal life is valued alongside other valuable things such as the mother's life and the well-being of the entire Muslim community, and abortion would have become legal only for medical reasons to save the mother's life, particularly those with valvular heart diseases, renal failure, and uncontrollable autoimmune hepatitis, or for other foetal deformities and disorders incompatible with life such as Potter's syndrome, or Chromosomal disorders leading to deformation [28, 29]. In conclusion, Islamic law has historically been adaptable and sensitive to public needs and social realities.

### CONCLUSION

Eventually, abortion is regarded as a state of decision made by the patient and physician under the influence of several factors. Although it was previously prohibited due to different social and religious ethics, it is now recognized as a legal act. Without a reason to suspect, medicine will never abandon the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath, which usually opposes abortion; physicians will constantly review and re-evaluate the constant changes in society; however, if the physician sees himself not complying with the act of abortion, he still has the right to deny it and refer the patient to another specialist.

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