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### **Exercise in Professionalism**

Adapted from the longer training published by the National Abortion Federation

As physicians, we are expected to be objective when providing patient care. But we all hold personal values that can influence how we respond to patients. Some of these values are very clear to us and easily articulated. Others exist at a deeper level and may influence how we treat patients without our awareness. Our values also change as we gain life experience and professional experience.

**Professionalism** is one of the core competencies that you are expected to learn during residency. As defined by the ACGME, professionalism includes the ability to:

- Demonstrate respect, compassion, and integrity; a responsiveness to the needs of patients and society that supersedes self-interest; accountability to patients, society, and the profession; and a commitment to excellence and on-going professional development
- Demonstrate a commitment to ethical principles pertaining to provision or withholding of clinical care, confidentiality of patient information, informed consent, and business practices
- Demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to patients' culture, age, gender, and disabilities

As humans, we are judgmental people. Professionalism involves separating the judgments that we make as humans from the care that we provide for patients as professionals.

The following exercise is intended to help you reflect on some of your personal values regarding sexuality and reproduction and the ways in which these personal values may influence the patient care that you provide.

#### **Ground rules:**

1. Allow everyone to speak
2. Be respectful of others views

**EXERCISE 1**

If you do not have children, which of the following statements would apply to you?

- Do not want to have children
- Not ready to have children
- Infertility/difficulty conceiving
- Lack of opportunity
- Do not want to be a single parent
- Financial reasons
- Health Reasons
- Career goals
- Placed a child for adoption
- Loss of child

Have you had experience with any of the following, either as a child or family member?

- Welfare
- Mental Health Problems
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Prenatal health risk of a mother
- Single parenting
- Divorce/blended families

For parents, have you experienced any of the following with your child/children?

- Health challenges
- Mental health issues
- Drug addictions
- Financial challenges
- Single parenting
- Divorce
- Death of a child

Consider how these personal experiences might complicate your ability to understand your patient's choices.

Which of the following apply to your experience with abortion?

- My partner or I have had an abortion
- I have accompanied a family member
- I have accompanied a friend
- I am aware that a family member or close friend had an abortion
- My partner or I have considered abortion because of pregnancy
- My family or I picket at abortion clinics
- No personal experience with abortion

If you or your partner has had an abortion, describe the positive and negative aspects of this decision.

How do you think your experiences with abortion have challenged or assisted in your objectivity as a physician when counseling a woman about her pregnancy options?

Have you experienced any of the following during your own experiences, or those of a partner, with birth control?

- Difficulty accessing birth control
- Parental disapproval
- Partner conflict
- Financial difficulties
- Misinformation
- Compliance difficulty
- Lack of preparation
- Failure of method
- Medical contraindication
- Use influenced by drugs or alcohol
- Assumed partner was using
- Cultural difference

Have you or your partner experienced side effects of birth control including allergic reaction, weight gain, mood changes, irregular bleeding, nausea, pain, change in sexual performance, acne, change in sexual pleasure, or change in libido?

How many times have you or your partner changed birth control?

How have these personal experiences strained or assisted your objectivity when you discuss birth control and pregnancy with patients?

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## **EXERCISE 2**

- I can accept a woman's abortion decision in any circumstance when she has made an informed and voluntary decision.
- I can accept a woman's abortion decision in certain circumstances including:
- to end a pregnancy that threatened her life
  - to end a pregnancy that threatened her physical health
  - to end a pregnancy that threatened her mental health
  - to end a pregnancy involving a significant fetal abnormality
  - to end a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest
  - to end a pregnancy resulting from birth control failure
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman is unmarried
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman is in an unstable relationship or is not in a relationship
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman does not want any more children
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman is not financially able to care for a child
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman feels she is not ready for the responsibility of a child
  - to end a pregnancy if a child would interfere with educational or career goals
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman is unready for how a child could change her life
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman is very young
  - to end a pregnancy if the woman has not had a previous abortion
  - to end a pregnancy because of gender
- I find abortion unacceptable under any circumstances

## **EXERCISE 3**

You are on a hospital committee tasked with deciding which of the following patients may have the one abortion left in the hospital's quota for the year.

- 12 year old incest victim
- 15 year old rape victim
- 22 year old carrying a fetus with a severe deformity
- 24 year old heroin addict who already has three children in state custody
- 26 year old single mother how has a young child with leukemia
- 30 year old with 2 children whose husband recently died in a car crash

The six women below have come to you requesting an abortion. Because of circumstances beyond your control, you can only refer one of them for an abortion. Rank the cases from 1 (most want to refer) to 6 (least want to refer).

- \_\_\_ Gloria is 14 years old, unsure about what to do. She has supportive parents.
  - \_\_\_ Louise is 19 years old, has two children and has had two previous abortions.
  - \_\_\_ Selma is 24 years old, a student in medical school and engaged to be married. She wants to begin her career before starting her own family.
  - \_\_\_ Eileen is 29 years old, single, and pregnant with an IUD in place.
  - \_\_\_ Margaret is 35 years old, divorced, pregnant from a one-night encounter, her first sexual experience following her divorce.
  - \_\_\_ Dorothy is 45 years old, married with 3 grown children. Neither she nor her husband wants any more children.
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#### **EXERCISE 4**

Indicate your first emotional response to each woman described below who is choosing to **continue her pregnancy and become a parent**. Mark the line to identify your feelings.

Cindy is 20, has been unsuccessful in her attempts to overcome her cocaine addiction of two years. She has one child in foster care. She is on welfare and does not have a steady boyfriend.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Sarah is 16, living at home with her adoptive parents. Her birth mother was 13 when she gave her up for adoption. She feels she would be disloyal to her birth mother if she did not go through with the pregnancy because her mother continued her pregnancy.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Kaiya is 36, has 3 children, all girls, ages 8, 6, and 4. She has not imagined having more than 3 children but her husband is hopeful that this pregnancy will be a boy. She feels her husband's wishes are important and is sympathetic to his desire for a boy. They are in a secure financial position.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Liza is 30, pregnant for the first time. She has not told her husband she went off birth control because he says he is not ready for children and will be ready in a year or two. She states she is sure he will change his mind. She says she would not be emotionally or financially prepared to be a single parent.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Karen is 46, broke up with long term partner who doesn't want a child, will have to go on welfare, but has always wanted a child. She has limited family support and has a history of depression, although it is now controlled with medication.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

*[Group Leader Discussion Questions:*

*-Which women made you very comfortable versus very uncomfortable?*

*-What can you learn about the things that you value from this exercise?*

*-How might these types of judgments show up in your interactions with patients?*

*-How did this exercise make you feel? Were there any surprises for you? ]*

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**EXERCISE 5**

*[Group Leader: If time allows...We also make judgments about adoption.]*

Indicate your first emotional response to each woman described below who is choosing to **continue her pregnancy and make adoption arrangements**. Mark the line to identify your feelings.

Jen is 28, has just found out she is 14 weeks pregnant. She was adopted at birth by an older North American couple who brought her from South America. She is an artist, her boyfriend a student, both carrying large student loans. She feels she has a responsibility to her birth mother to through a pregnancy and place her baby for adoption. Her partner tries to remain neutral but is visibly very upset.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Vicki, age 28, has a history of mental health problems but is capable of making her own decisions. She is 15 weeks pregnant and has not told the man involved in the pregnancy. She is canceling her abortion appointment because she has seen a TV show about women who can't have children and she was very moved by their plight. She has decided she would like to place her baby for adoption to help infertile couples.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Anna is a single parent of two children. She had sex with an ex-husband who is re-married. She says she cannot afford another child and does not feel comfortable with abortion. She has not told her ex-husband about the pregnancy. She says she has decided to place the baby for adoption to a distant relative.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

Tiffany, age 15, wants to continue her pregnancy and place her baby for adoption to a loving couple she met at her friend's church. Her parents are upset and want to "talk some sense into her." They believe it is in Tiffany's best interest to have an abortion. Tiffany says she is not ready to be a parent and does not "believe" in abortion.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable

April, age 33, has recently broken up with her boyfriend. She is devastated about the pregnancy but she does not think she could reconcile abortion with her spiritual beliefs. Her friends and family are trying to influence her to continue the pregnancy and raise the child with their help but she thinks she would not be able to provide a life that she has imagined for a child. She has decided to place her baby for adoption. Her boyfriend is upset but does not want to become a parent.

Very comfortable \_\_\_\_\_ Very Uncomfortable