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Abortion: Opponents of RU 486 plan boycott

■ Continued from Page 1

Grants Pass, Medford and [Eugene] do not provide abortion services," she said. "The Planned Parenthood Federation of America has said that the only clinics who will initially be able to provide the medical drug abortions will be clinics who do abortion services. Southwestern Oregon [clinics] will probably be forced to wait [for RU 486] by our parent organization."

The University of Oregon Student Health Center Women's Clinic had no comment concerning the availability and distribution of RU 486.

The controversy behind the pill is more than political. RU 486 is not a simple, over-the-counter remedy. The process is lengthy in comparison to a 15-minute surgical abortion. A pharmaceutical abortion can last up to 48 hours, with four required medical visits.

The process involves a two-part dosage of mifepristone and misoprostol. Mifepristone blocks the effects of progesterone and terminates the pregnancy. The second dosage, misoprostol, causes contractions to expel the egg within 24 hours.

RU 486 is 96 percent effective and considered to be a non-invasive procedure. Women can take RU 486 immediately after they detect pregnancy. Surgical abortion, however, requires women to be at least seven weeks pregnant before the operation can be performed.

However, the real problems lie not with the process of taking RU 486, but with the political struggle over its legalization. In 1989, the Bush Administration issued an "import alert" banning further research and the use of mifepristone.

President Clinton lifted the ban on RU 486 in January 1993. The mifepristone patent was donated to the Population Council, a private research group, to sponsor the clinical trials. The trials' results will serve as the basis to obtain FDA approval.

Jeffrey K. Lewis, a candidate for the Republican primary for the Oregon U.S. Senate seat, said he fully supports the legalization of RU 486. He said he believes the medical profession should determine if RU 486 is safe and effective — not the government.

"I think it should be determined by the medical profession," he said. "I'm not a doctor. Most Congressmen are not doctors. If it's found to be effective and safe, I see no problem with using it."

RU 486 still faces opposition. Gayle Atteberry, executive director for Oregon Right to Life, vows to boycott any manufacturer that will carry RU 486.

"We have found in the past that boycotts have been effective," Atteberry said. "We have announced a major boycott against drugs produced by Hoechst-Roussel [the manufacturer of RU 486] and [their merger] Marion Merrell Dow."

Anti-abortion activists' biggest fear is that abortion may become a convenience for expectant women.

"RU 486 will take a little of the stigma off, and [doctors] would be able to probably perform abortions a little easier without people knowing it," Atteberry said. "So, because of that, it would become more available, and abortions will increase."

Pro-choice supporters believe RU 486 will help reestablish the private relationship between doctor and patient. Abortion providers may become harder to target by anti-abortion activists seeking to interfere with the provision of abortion services.

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— Jeffrey K. Lewis
Republican candidate for U.S. Senate

"The beauty of it is that every doctor will have the ability to prescribe it for [his or her] patients," said Marcia Latta, field organizer for Oregon's National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League chapter.

"We want a doctor to assess the needs of specific patients. ... There won't really be any way that they can be targeted," Latta said.

For now, both opponents and supporters of RU 486 await the FDA's decision.

The Population Council's RU 486 clinical trials ended in September 1995. Atteberry believes that even if RU 486 is not legalized, it will not be the end of pharmaceutical abortion.

"What we will probably see is more experimentation, more alternatives, different ways maybe with drugs already approved by FDA," Atteberry said.

"Even if we stopped RU 486, the whole issue of being able to do a chemical abortion will not go away," she said.

Helton agrees that the possible legalization of the abortion pill will not conclude the nation's abortion war.

"I don't think this is the magic bullet to end it," Helton said. "[The outcome] can't be sealed: it will be tempered a little bit. But, it's not really over."

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