

Cytotec in the media

An ill turn on abortion debate

On February 14th, *Jornal do Brasil* attracted a great amount of attention with an article on existing internet *Orkut* communities through which *Cytotec* (market name for misoprostol) can be bought. The headline *A um clique do aborto clandestino*, “Click for clandestine abortion” is followed by a text dense with recrimination, describing how these communities work and how easily one can order high dosages of the medicine by e-mail or MSN at elevated prices. Hadn’t the approach been so superficial, careless and tendentious, the newspaper could have rendered the population a great service by showing more precise information on the medicine into the debate on sexual and reproductive rights in Brazil, and bringing up the real implications behind restrictions to its use and commercialization.

In unison with journalism most usual approaches, the text treats voluntary abortion as crime, and places *Cytotec* together with all other illegal abortive drugs, when actually the medicine is the result of an extent research and regarded as an outstanding scientific development in gynecology and obstetrics medical areas. Its use is associated to reduction of maternal and neonatal morbi-mortality and it is approved by *OMS – Organização Mundial de Saúde* (World Health Organization), *FEBRASGO – Federação Brasileira de Ginecologia e Obstetrícia* (Brazilian Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics), *FLASOG – Federação Latino Americana das Sociedades de Obstetrícia e Ginecologia* (Latin American Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Societies) and the Health Ministry. Countless scientific evidences exist in favor of the use of misoprostol and it is considered the most adequate medicine for safe abortion processes.

The report of the symposium named “The role of misoprostol in maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity prevention” held in São Paulo city in October, 2008, showed that studies carried out in the last ten years confirm: “...even in clandestine situations, abortions induced by use of misoprostol are safer than the ones induced by other procedures.” It points out that “...when correctly used in precise obstetric prescriptions, (...) it has huge potential to reduce not only women’s health complications and death percentage as well as related costs imposed to public health system.” The document also makes clear that obstacles to expanding the use of misoprostol in Brazil are of political nature.

That is something the article in *Jornal do Brasil* never refers to. As well as it never mentions the fact that *ANVISA – Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária* (The National Health Surveillance Agency) restrictions to *Cytotec* conflict with resolutions made by the Health Ministry and are also contradictory, since the agency itself added misoprostol to its Model List of Essential Medicaments but at the same time keeps creating bureaucratic barriers to its use in the public health system (*SUS*)

The newspaper report does not once associate the existence of such internet communities to clandestine and inadequate use of the medicine, lack of information, restrictions to sexual and reproductive rights or poor debate on abortion in Brazil. On top of all, even if not willingly (rests a doubt), it provides further reason for the creation

COMMITTEE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND REPRODUCTION

of the dubious *CPI do Aborto*, a parliamentary inquiry committee to investigate abortion.

While in Spain headlines announce the new abortion law and the country gets aligned with many others in the European Union, benefiting Spanish women, here in Brazil our newspapers (with rare exceptions) insist on publishing sensationalist and discriminatory articles on the subject that end up rendering a huge disservice to the population, mainly the poorer layers. Elucidating debates involving all the questions referring to abortion, specially human rights, should be promoted by the press and widely disclosed throughout the country. On the contrary, very little is informed, very few questions are raised and a lot is left out.