

It astounds me, that in 2016, we are still debating whether having a termination of pregnancy is a criminal offence.

Access to safe termination is a human right and women deserve to be able to make this complex decision themselves, without the threat of themselves, or their medical officer, facing criminal charges.

As a health practitioner, working in a clinic which provides terminations, I understand there are a myriad of reasons as to why women cannot continue a pregnancy. These factors are varied, personal and should not be subject to the scrutiny of public opinion.

I believe medical officers, regardless of their personal opinion need to provide women with access to this medical procedure; or at the absolute minimum, refer women to a medical officer who will provide a termination. Withholding clinical information about termination, or discriminating against women due to their request, is unacceptable. Removing termination of pregnancy from the criminal code would increase women's access to termination and improve the quality of care that women receive.

As for the suggestion from anti-choice campaigners that women might demand a termination days or hours before a delivery, this is absolutely absurd. No medical officer would be willing to complete such a procedure and no woman would consider making such a request. A report by South Australian Department Health (2015) suggests that over 90% of terminations are performed in the first trimester. Additionally, only 2% of terminations are performed at 20 weeks gestation or over, with the majority of those terminations requested due to foetal abnormality detected at a 20 week ultrasound.

First and foremost, sections 224-226 of the Criminal Code need to be repealed immediately, for the benefit of women and the medical officers providing termination. The medical profession can then go on to openly discuss appropriate gestation and guidelines for termination, leaving women to freely access the essential reproductive health services they are entitled to.

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