Chapter 13

Abortion
Definitions

- Abortion = Deliberately induced expulsion of an embryo or fetus from the uterus

- Miscarriage = Spontaneous expulsion of an embryo or fetus from the uterus
Test Your Knowledge

Q: About what percentage of abortions in the US take place in the first trimester (12 weeks)?
A: 90%

Q: About how many abortions are performed each year in the US?
A: 1.2 million

Q: T/F – 25% of all pregnancies in the US are unintended, and about 25% of these end in abortion.
A: FALSE, approximately 50% are unintended, and about 40% of those end in abortion.
The Abortion Debate: 
*The Central Questions*

- When does life begin?
- Should there be equal protection under the law for the mother and the fetus and starting from what age of the fetus?
- Where’s the balance between freedom and responsibility?
- How can we reduce the *need* for abortion? *(Recall that nearly 50% of pregnancies are unintended).*
History of Abortion in the United States

- Until early 1800’s, abortions were legal when performed prior to “quickening”
- By 1900, nearly all states had anti-abortion and anti-contraception laws
- 1960’s, these laws were contested
  - Constitutionality
  - Right to privacy
- 1973 – *Roe v. Wade*
**Roe v. Wade**

- U.S. Supreme Court Case
- Lawsuit legalized abortion in the U.S.
  - The *woman* should make that choice
- New standards regulated abortion decisions
  - Divided pregnancy into trimesters
  - Gave women less control as pregnancy advanced
History – US Supreme Court Cases Affect State Abortion Laws

- 1976: minors obtain parental consent
- 1980: restrictions on Medicaid funding
- 1989: restrict public funding of unnecessary abortions; viability testing on fetuses >20 weeks old
- 1992: allows states to restrict access; the restrictions cannot cause “undue burden” to the mother
History (cont’d) – Abortion in the United States

- 2000: FDA approves mifepristone (RU-486), the abortion pill
- 2003: Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act signed into law
- 2004: Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act declared unconstitutional
- Today, approx 19 states have banned “Partial Birth Abortion” procedure
Abortion Decisions by Trimester

- **First trimester**
  - Woman and physician

- **Second trimester**
  - State may regulate factors…
  - To protect health of the mother

- **Third trimester (after 24 weeks – viability)**
  - State may regulate or prohibit all abortions EXCEPT when abortion is necessary to preserve the life or health of the mother
Abortion Methods

**Surgical Abortion**
- Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA)
  - 3-12 weeks
- Dilation and Curettage (D&C)
  - 6-12 weeks
- Dilation and Evacuation (D&E)
  - 13-24 weeks
- Late-Term Abortions (>24 weeks)
  - Labor Induction
  - Dilation and Extraction ("Partial Birth" Abortion)

**Medical Abortions**
- Mifepristone (RU-486, or the "Abortion Pill")
  - Up to 49 days (7w gestation / 9w since last period); or >15w
  - Mifepristone blocks uterine absorption of progesterone
  - Misoprostol (induces contractions) is taken 2 days later
  - 2-week follow up with doctor
- Methotrexate – stops cells from dividing
Dilation & Curettage
Early Abortion

6 week Aspiration

8 week D&C
Dilation and Evacuation Abortion (D&E) of a 23 Week Old Fetus

A. The body parts are grasped at random with a long toothed clamp.

B. The body parts are pulled from the fetal body out the vaginal canal.

C. The remaining body parts are grasped and pulled out.

D. The head is grasped and crushed in order to remove it from the vaginal canal.

E. The placenta and remaining contents are suctioned from the uterus.
Why Women Choose Abortion

- Rape/incest: 1%
- Woman's health: 7%
- Health of fetus: 13%
- Can't afford a child: 68%
- Too young/immature, or can't handle responsibility: 31%
- Husband/partner doesn't want the child: 23%
- Problems with relationship, or wants to avoid single parenthood: 51%
- Would change her life (job, school): 76%
- Doesn't want people to know she had sex/is pregnant: 31%
Effects of Abortion

- **Physical**
  - Infection
  - Bleeding
  - Cervical or uterine trauma
  - Incomplete abortion
  - Missed ectopic pregnancy

- **Psychological**
  - Relief
  - Remorse, regret, guilt, sadness, anger
  - Unresolved emotions – seek counseling
Decision Making

- Is the mother’s health or life at risk?
- Can I accept my decision and all the consequences of carrying to term or aborting this baby?
- What are my partner’s feelings?
- What are all my options?
- Do I have support if I decide to keep, abort, or give up the baby?