Limited Ultrasound Protocol for Medication Abortion

Medication abortion can be performed without routine use of ultrasound. The gestational age can be estimated using a combination of patient history, LMP, and exam.

Many practices have routinized ultrasonography prior to medication abortion for a variety of reasons. However, requiring sonography can limit access due to:

- Financial cost to medical office of purchasing/maintaining an ultrasound machine
- Difficulty obtaining necessary training on limited use ultrasound and/or cost of paying technician
- Financial cost to patients obtaining these sonograms (especially if paying out of pocket)
- Delays in care
- Provider discomfort offering medication abortion WITHOUT ultrasound if training was only with ultrasound

When is ultrasound indicated in medication abortion care?

**Pre-abortion (to determine gestational age)**

1. Possible Gestational age > 10 weeks
   a. If ultrasound is available on-site: if LMP >10 weeks ago, perform sono FIRST to determine GA
   b. If ultrasound is off-site: if LMP>10 weeks, perform bimanual exam FIRST and if exam is <10 weeks, proceed with MAB. If exam >10 weeks, refer out for sono/abortion
2. Patient had no menses and it has been more than 10 weeks since delivery or abortion
3. Pregnancy occurs while amenorrheic from using long-acting progestin contraceptive (i.e., Depo, implant)
4. Provider uncertainty with bimanual exam

**Pre-abortion (to assess for ectopic risk)**

1. History of previous ectopic pregnancy
2. Becoming pregnant with an IUD in place
3. Adnexal mass on exam
   a. If low-suspicion of ectopic, discuss ease, comfort, and cost of sono vs. initiating medication abortion with close (3 day) follow up
   b. If high-suspicion of ectopic, refer for definitive care as appropriate

**Post-abortion**

1. History not consistent with successful medication (no bleeding or cramping)
2. Patient reports still feeling pregnant
3. Serum HCG has not declined by 60% in 2-3 days or by 90% in 1 week
4. No initial HCG was drawn and urine HCG is still positive more than 3 weeks later

NAF guidelines state:

“The use of ultrasound is not a requirement for the provision of first trimester abortion care. Proper use of ultrasound may inform clinical decision-making in abortion care.”

“Gestational age must be verified to be within the limits of the facility medical abortion protocol.”

-NAF, *Clinical Policy Guidelines for Abortion Care*, 2018