

14/6/05

**Women's Health Queensland Wide's Submission to the Senate
Community Affairs Committee:
Inquiry into Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy
Counselling Services Bill 2005.**

Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc. is a statewide health promotion, information and education service, run for women by women. We promote women's health by working with individuals, community groups and organisations and government. We believe all aspects of women's lives affect their health and wellbeing. We aim to provide a range of options for women so they can make informed choices about their own health. We value women's diversity, experience and knowledge. We provide balanced information, independent of health care provider interests.

Operating since 1982, and incorporated in 1985, the organisation continues to develop as a leader in the provision of quality health information for women and health practitioners throughout Queensland.

5 Misleading advertising or notification of pregnancy counseling services

(1) An organisation, authority, agency, association or person that provides a pregnancy counseling service must not print, publish, distribute, display or broadcast, or cause, permit or authorize to be printed, published, distributed, displayed or broadcast:

(a) any advertising material that is misleading or deceptive as to the nature of the services it provides

The information provided by some pregnancy counselling agencies on abortion is inaccurate and misleading.

Pregnancy Counselling Australia's website, for example, states that abortion "may increase the risk of Breast Cancer" (1). This statement is not one supported by the medical community. In February 2003, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) convened a workshop of over 100 of the world's leading experts who study pregnancy and breast cancer risk. They concluded that having an abortion or miscarriage does not increase a woman's subsequent risk of developing breast cancer (2). A metaanalysis of 53 studies, published in the Lancet in the following year came to a similar conclusion: "Pregnancies that end as a spontaneous abortion or induced abortion do not increase a woman's risk of developing breast cancer" (3).

In addition, Pregnancy Counselling Australia's website claims that when a woman becomes pregnant, the pregnancy is recorded and reinforced in her mind. The website states "As the biological attachment grows and becomes more intimate, so does the psychological attachment. This intimacy creates an indelible imprint in the

mind of the mother. Her memory stores the individual characteristics of this child” (4). There is, however, little evidence that such an imprinting process occurs in the way described.

The information provided by some pregnancy counseling agencies provide biased information on women’s pregnancy options.

While some organisations may claim to provide information on all pregnancy options (adoption, parenting, abortion), the information provided on abortion is often biased. For example, on Pregnancy Counselling Link’s website the (only) reasons provided for women having an abortion are the following:

- You are being pressured into terminating the pregnancy by your partner or family members.
- You believe that abortion is your only option.
- You feel afraid of the reaction of your parents and family members, and so, do not want to tell them.
- You believe that no one would support your decision to keep your baby.
- Keeping your baby might ruin your chances to finish your education or pursue a career (5)

This implies that women are either pressured into the decision or their decision is made for reasons that are imagined, rather than ‘real’.

If an organisation does not provide women with all available options (adoption, parenting, abortion) this should be made clear in their advertising. Pregnancy Counselling Australia’s website only list pregnancy and adoption under the heading “What Are Your Alternatives?” (6).

(b) any notification of its services that is misleading or deceptive as to the nature of the services it provides.

Misleading or deceptive notification of pregnancy counselling services impacts on other organisation’s ability to maintain relevant and accurate referral databases for clients

Many referral databases rely on services providing the information which describes the service. If misleading or deceptive information is supplied the organisation is unable to provide relevant and accurate referrals. Some pregnancy counselling agencies’ entries on referral databases do not clearly indicate that they do not provide abortion referrals. An example entry of such a service reads, “*Provides counselling - telephone & face-to-face on any concern or issue related to pregnancy &/or abortion. FREE & CONFIDENTIAL.*” This description could be interpreted by that the service provides information on all pregnancy options, including abortion referral when in fact the service does not.

Misleading or deceptive advertising/notification of pregnancy counselling services seriously impacts on a woman’s ability to contact a service relevant to their needs.

Facing an unwanted pregnancy can be a stressful and emotional time for women. They do not need the added burden of difficulties in contacting a service relevant to their needs. This is particularly the case, although not limited to, young women, women who victims of are domestic violence and culturally and linguistically diverse

women. For these women making an initial contact might be a major step and, therefore, choosing a service which turns out not be relevant to their needs, further complicates an already difficult situation.

References

- 1 Pregnancy Counselling Australia. **Physical Effects**
<http://www.pregnancycounselling.com.au/physical_effects.htm> date accessed 6th June 2006
- 2 National Cancer Institute. **Abortion, Miscarriage, and Breast Cancer Risk**
<<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/abortion-miscarriage>> 21 March 2003; date accessed 6th June 2006
- 3 Beral, V et al. Breast cancer and abortion: collaborative reanalysis of data from 53 epidemiological studies, including 83 000 women with breast cancer from 16 countries *Lancet* 2004; 363:9414:1007-16
- 4 Pregnancy Counselling Australia. **What is an Abortion?**
<http://www.pregnancycounselling.com.au/what_is_abortion.htm> date accessed 6th June 2006
- 5 Pregnancy Counselling Australia. **What is an Abortion?** Ibid
- 6 Pregnancy Counselling Australia. **Homepage**
<<http://www.pregnancycounselling.com.au>> date accessed 6th June 2006

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