

The Bessie Smyth Foundation
Established July 1977
39 North Parade
Auburn NSW 2144
Ph: (02) 9649-9744
Fax: (02) 9649-8144
ABN: 23 001 477 729

**Submission to Senate Community Affairs
Legislation Committee**

**Reference: *Therapeutic Goods Amendment
(Repeal of Ministerial Responsibility for
Approval of RU 486) Bill 2005***

**Prepared by:
Margaret Kirkby
January 2006**

Executive Summary

Recommendations

- 1. THAT the Committee recommend that Ministerial approval for 'restricted goods' and specifically for RU486 be repealed and that evaluation, monitoring, and approval processes for drugs such as RU486 be brought into line with the evidence-based assessment used for all other medicines in Australia, that is, these drugs be evaluated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.**
- 2. THAT there is no case for the continued singling out of abortifacient drugs as 'restricted goods' nor is there any case which can be made for these drugs to require Ministerial approval. Rather they should be subject to the same approval processes as for all other drugs in Australia, that is, by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.**
- 3. THAT the Committee recommends, if RU486 is eventually approved for distribution by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, that it be available to all Australian women whether located in metropolitan or rural or remote areas.**
- 4. THAT we support the Rural Doctors Association of Australia statements in their presentation to the Committee on 15th December 2005 that: "*the rural and remote medical workforce operate an advanced scope of practice and deal with a lot of emergencies which includes pregnancy, miscarriage and other sequelae of pregnancy*".**
- 5. THAT to deny rural and remote women access to this drug would breach the Convention for the**

Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Further, it implies that the rural and remote medical workforce is not to be trusted to administer this drug appropriately. Such an implication is an anathema.

- 6. THAT, concurrent with recommendation 3, 4 and 5 and if the TGA should approve distribution of RU486, the Federal Government provide funding to each state and territory to establish a statewide telephone information and referral service which would provide pregnancy options counselling in a non-judgemental and non-directive manner.**
- 7. THAT, concurrent with recommendation 3, 4, 5 and 6 the statewide telephone information and referral services also have a Unit which provides back-up medical advice to regional, rural and remote medical workforce staff in regard to matters relating to counselling, administration of and monitoring of RU486.**
- 8. THAT, if the TGA were to approve the use of RU486, the Abortion Providers Federation of Australasia and the Australian Women's Health Network be invited by the Joint Consultative Committee of Obstetrics to participate in the drafting of protocols for the use of RU486 across Australia.**
- 9. THAT, if the TGA were to approve the use of RU486, there be a Medicare item number for it and that it be no less in quantity than the current amount available for item 35643 (suction curettage). In addition, that a Medicare item number for counselling (by appropriately trained counsellors) be created and that the amount for that item number be no less than \$120 (for 60 minutes counselling).**

The Bessie Smyth Foundation

Background information

The Bessie Smyth Foundation was founded by the Sydney Women's Liberation Movement in July 1977. The Foundation owned and managed Australia's first feminist abortion service, which traded as The Powell Street Clinic.

The Powell Street Clinic was very different to the for-profit abortion services: each woman who attended the service saw a counsellor for 45 to 60 minutes (longer if she needed it, shorter if that was her preference – we always took guidance as to her needs from the woman herself); the service was kept as a homey environment (whilst at the same time adhering to NSW Health standards regarding infection control and so on) so to normalize abortion.

In the recovery room women were encouraged to talk with each other and share their stories – women found they had more in common than not!

We owned and managed the Powell Street Clinic for 25 years from 1977 until August 2002 when we sold our business and premises to a British multinational.

The Bessie Smyth Foundation no longer owns or manages a termination of pregnancy service.

We now provide a statewide telephone Pregnancy Options Service, providing counselling, information, referral and advocacy. Our advocacy work is particularly targeted towards low income and disadvantaged women.