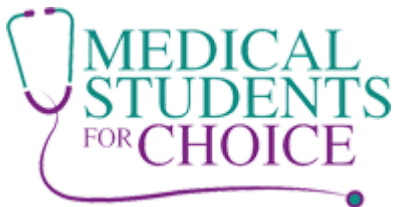




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TESTIMONIAL

"My experience was incredible. I learned so much in such a short amount of time."

2015 RHE Participant

"It is wonderful to find a community of supportive colleagues. I'm excited to be on this path towards becoming and abortion provider."

2015 Abortion Training Institute participant

Abortion Training Institute: A Chance to Reflect on Choice

Oct 20, 2014

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Despite running on no more than thirty minutes of sleep, my mind wouldn't stop buzzing. Walking through Philadelphia International Airport, en route to MSFC's Abortion Training Institute, I was curious about what the conference would entail—what skills I would learn, what experiences and opinions I would be exposed to.

For the most part I was excited. As part of a largely pro-choice undergraduate and medical community, I've been privileged with many opportunities to learn about abortion care and to engage in many conversations around reproductive justice. Each of these interactions, whether with classmates, providers or activists, has furthered and complicated my understanding of abortion care. I sought out the Abortion Training Institute because I wanted to keep learning: to keep having these conversations with diverse groups of people and to keep challenging my own assumptions about choice.

Challenging Assumptions

Our first workshop did not disappoint. Called the "Values Clarification Session," it was an assumption-challenging power hour where we explored our biases and comfort levels with various aspects of abortion care. People engaged in debate over the meaning of viability and definitions of person-hood. When our facilitator brought up the issue of incarcerating pregnant women who refused treatment for drug addiction, I found myself confronting my own norms about pregnancy, childcare, and bodily autonomy. *Who gets to decide what is best for a pregnancy?* When do we take that control away from pregnant women? Seeing future physicians discuss their boundaries, in such an open environment, I realized how important values are in abortion care.

In the world of medicine, especially in reproductive healthcare, we're often told about the importance of providing "non-judgmental, non-biased" care. What this session made very clear, however, is that bias and judgment are all unavoidable parts of clinical abortion and reproductive care. Healthcare providers are human, and will bring very human values to their work. As a future clinician, I'll inevitably run across scenarios in my practice that will trigger me emotionally, or lead me to pass judgment on a patient based on my beliefs. But

having biases doesn't mean I'll be compromising people's care. Instead, by owning my assumptions and my values, rather than pretending that they don't exist, I can be better prepared for these triggers when they come up. And more importantly, I can work past them to focus on providing the best care for the person in front of me.

Bringing Change

Reflecting on the Institute now there's still much of the experience that stays with me. One physician mentioned during the provider panel that MSFC was the reason she stayed in medical school — a sentiment that greatly resonates with me. For much of my medical training thus far, I've felt bogged down by details of biochemical pathways and pharmacokinetics, feeling removed from patient care. Since becoming a part of the MSFC community, I've begun to reconnect with why I wanted to become a doctor in the first place — to deliver care and bring change. As an abortion provider, I will not only be able to provide one of the *most common yet most inaccessible medical procedures*, but also provide knowledge, safety, comfort, affirmation, and reassurance.

MSFC's Abortion Training Institute reminded me that without the work of fearless providers, there would be no choice. *But let's not forget that a woman's access to providers is only one part of her ability to choose.* In a culture where women are shamed for their sexuality and denied access to affordable family planning, there is no choice. In a system where only wealthy women can access care, there is no choice. In a society where one out of six women experiences sexual assault, there is no choice. In a country that mass incarcerates women of color, sterilizes them without their consent, and denies them access to basic reproductive healthcare, there is no choice.

Even as a future provider, I know I won't even begin to tackle most of these issues. But I'm grateful to MSFC for giving me a head start—for giving me both the clinical skills and the amazing network of providers, activists, and counselors tirelessly working for women and for choice. I hope to join them one day. Until then, I'll be sure to keep learning, keep reflecting, and keep challenging.

 **By: Gopika Krishna**

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