

## **Assessing the quality of patient information leaflets about abortion methods in England and Wales**

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**Objective:** To compare the readability and information quality of the patient information leaflets in England and Wales.

**Sample:** Random selection of abortion clinics in England and Wales in 2001: NHS teaching hospitals (n = 14); NHS district hospitals (n = 27) and private providers (n = 3). **Method:** Text-analysis: 1) readability - the Flesch Readability Ease scale; 2) information quality - coding frame informed by guidelines on choices between medical and surgical abortion, to assess the number of items leaflets referred to about the abortion method, options consequences and risks.

**Results:** Forty-four sets of leaflets were analysed: one discussed medical abortion only, 15 discussed surgical abortion only, and 28 discussed both options. On readability assessment, 4% scored 40-50 (difficult to read - Financial Times); 53% scored 51-60 (fairly difficult - UK Daily Telegraph); 39% scored 61-70 (standard UK Daily Mail); 4% scored 71 - 80 (fairly easy - UK Sun). For information content, on average 10 out of 23 possible items were included in the "surgical" leaflets, and 12 out of 21 items for the "medical" leaflets. All leaflets have discussed aftercare, on average 7 out of 11 items were included. Sixty-eight percent did not mention confidentiality, 5% did not state the name of the clinic and 36% omitted the date of leaflet production. Leaflet information quality of the NHS district hospitals was significantly lower than NHS teaching hospitals. (surgical information:  $p = 0.053$  and medical information:  $p = 0.030$ )

**Conclusion:** The average leaflet only gives about half the information possible. Despite that, only half of the leaflets were of the readability of the Daily Mail or easier. Only 83% of the British population can easily read at this level. Therefore, it seems unlikely that most women in England and Wales are in a position to make an informed decision about termination method.