

## The Unlicensed use of Misoprostol in the Medical Management of Miscarriage

### What is misoprostol?

The use of the drug 'misoprostol' is an integral part of both medical and surgical methods of terminating a miscarriage. In UK, misoprostol is a prostaglandin that has been licensed in the treatment of stomach ulcer. As misoprostol causes contractions and bleeding of the womb, it has been used for the purpose of emptying of the womb in the event of a miscarriage. However, miscarriage is **not** a 'licensed indication' of the use of misoprostol.

Nevertheless, doctors routinely prescribe medication for uses other than those indicated on a drug's licence, based on their clinical judgement and evidence presented in the scientific literature. A recent literature review<sup>1</sup> supports the use of misoprostol as a medical treatment to treat miscarriages. This specific use of misoprostol is also supported by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in the UK.

It is therefore the policy of the trust to allow the unlicensed use of misoprostol for both surgical and medical treatments of miscarriage, in accordance with its Medicine Policy.

### What are the alternatives?

Another prostaglandin drug, known as gemeprost, is equally as effective as misoprostol. The drawback of gemeprost is that it is almost 40 times more expensive than misoprostol, without any additional benefit. The use of misoprostol instead of gemeprost allows medical treatment of miscarriage to be more widely available.

### What are the potential risks and side effects?

Uterine cramping and bleeding are expected, as they are needed to expel the pregnancy. They usually begin within a few hours after inserting the tablets into the vagina. Other possible side effects include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, chills, shivering and fever.

### What are the expected benefits of treatment?

In medical treatment of miscarriage, misoprostol is given either as vaginal or oral tablets (or both), either alone or in combination with another tablet ("mifepristone", which is given two days beforehand), to cause contractions of the womb, thus expelling the pregnancy in the process. It is a highly effective medication.

### Will I have an anaesthetic?

No anaesthesia is required.

### How long will I be in hospital?

Following the administration of the misoprostol tablets, you are asked to stay in the hospital for approximately three hours.

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team - Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 5860 or by email at: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand Hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other Formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

**Tel: 01424 755255 Ext: 2620**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

Neilson JP, Hickey M, Vazquez J. (2008) Medical treatment of early fetal death (less than 24 weeks). Cochrane Database of Systemic Reviews, 1, 2008.

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

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The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

The EPAU Working Group

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Responsible clinician: Mr David Chui

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