

My Story

I found out I was pregnant on Canada Day, July 1st, 2013. My boyfriend had a friend working for the Abortion Rights Network of PEI and through this contact I was able to get real information about what my choices consisted of. I was lucky this way.

I decided on a medical abortion. The stats that anything would go wrong were low and the Island doctor who performed the procedure (there was only one at the time) had positive results in the past. From what I read on the internet, medical abortions were a bit painful and scary but not very invasive and once the pills were inserted, it was all over within a day in the privacy of your own home. Throughout the experience, I did not have access to women and their stories for more accurate guidance. Instead, I had the internet.

As I said, I happened to have the right connections and thankfully those connections helped me get an appointment with the Doctor five days after I found out I was pregnant. The Doctor presented my options and explained the procedure. It was stressed throughout the appointment that keeping the identity of the Doctor a complete secret was of utmost importance. More important than anything else. I signed the consent form, received the injection that halts the pregnancy and I was sent on my way. At this point, I was terrified, but relieved. I thought I was in the arms of a caring doctor and team who I could trust to keep me safe.

The situation gets convoluted very fast when it is shrouded in secrecy and silence. Yes, it is extremely important to keep all of this confidential, after all, women should be able to access medical abortion procedures here on Prince Edward Island without being hassled. However, how is one supposed to access such options or get help when the fear of discovery overpowers everything else?

Five days after the injection, I inserted the pills that expel the fetus. The Doctor told me the expulsion process would begin within two to three hours but nothing happened for five hours. Finally, I had average cramping and expelled a few strange shaped clumps of blood and placenta. It didn't hurt as much as I thought it was supposed to, and I didn't bleed as much as I thought I should.

With a lot of effort, I made a follow up appointment three days later. The Doctor didn't come in to speak with me, rather the nurse took a blood test with very little communication and no words of comfort. Days passed. Finally, the results came back saying that my "hormone levels are higher than they should be". More days passed before I had an appointment to repeat the process still no Doctor. The nurse was even colder this time as she quickly got the job done. More days passed as I waited for the results. Finally, the Doctor phoned and told me "my hormone levels are lower than the last test but still higher than they should be". I was told they should regulate with time and within two weeks I'd get my period. Two anxious and

torturous weeks pass me by. No period arrived. I took another pregnancy test at home. It was positive. Panic.

I had no way of contacting the Doctor himself which meant that it would take days to get a hold of him as his office hours changed daily. He is also a popular Island doctor with many patients. I desperately turned to my contact -the liaison between patients and the Doctor- for help and they told me that if I really needed help I should go to emergency. Since the Doctor never advised me to do so, I felt I couldn't. I was too scared to blow his cover.

I did not know if I was still pregnant. I did not know what was happening inside my body. If I couldn't trust a medical professional, who could I trust? Why haven't I had an ultrasound? Why am I not being taken seriously? Why have I been nauseous all day, every day? Was the fetus still growing inside of me? In the case that everything hadn't been expelled, would my hormones remain higher than usual which is what was stopping my period? What does that even entail? What are the risks I am facing? I knew that time was of the essence and if I had to redo the medical abortion, or if I had to go off-Island for a surgical abortion then I needed to have answers immediately. It was reigning terror on my emotional and mental state. It is at this point in my experience that I started to grow very resentful and angry.

I finally got in touch with the Doctor's office and told them that I still

hadn't gotten my period. On Doctor's orders, the nurse told me over the phone to come in for a third blood test. She sounded as if she just wanted me to get off the phone. This was the last straw for me. I told the nurse I was very concerned about my health and that I needed to talk to the Doctor in person. I must have sounded very strained because the nurse immediately went to talk to the doctor. The nurse told me "the Doctor would be able to see me for a minute tomorrow".

At this point, it had been more than a month since I'd had the injection and inserted the pills.

During the appointment with the Doctor the next day, he suggested I have an ultrasound which I agreed to with relief. He told me he would organize an appointment and I would get one within a couple of days. I had another blood test taken. My third in less than a month. Time passed. I never got a phone call concerning the blood test results nor did I get a call from the hospital for an ultrasound appointment. I tried to take it as good news. Doctors only phone back if it's bad news, right? All throughout the process, I tried to take the neglect I was receiving as positive news thinking that if it was truly important I wouldn't be ignored...

I tried phoning the Doctor numerous times a day for nearly a week until I got hold of him. The Doctor told me the hospital should have called a week ago for an ultrasound. In fact, the Doctor expected that I had already had the ultrasound.

After this unbelievable episode, an ultrasound appointment was immediately booked for a couple days later. The nurse at the QEH asked me if I was pregnant and I said that "I was". I was too scared to tell the truth in case I was refused care.

I was absolutely amazed when the Doctor phoned me later that day. I was told there was leftover lining that hadn't been expelled and that if I did not get my period within two weeks then greater measures would have to be taken that potentially held greater consequences. Nonetheless, the call from the Doctor was the best news I had heard in more than a month. There wasn't a fetus growing inside me. Strangely, it took only a few days after that phone call for my period to come. I wonder if receiving the results of the ultrasound and finally knowing what was happening inside me, relieved my body of a month of extreme anxiety that was somehow halting the expulsion.

I was very uninformed of what would happen to me when my period did come. The Doctor told me an estimated 3cm x 3cm mass would come out with my period. Not that it wouldn't have been notable, but I did not expect the amount of pain nor the amount of blood I experienced. I was under the impression that the majority of the lining/placenta had been expelled a month ago when I had undergone the procedure and inserted the pills. I was sadly mistaken. The night I got my period, I started to get painful cramps so I popped an extra-strength Tylenol recommended by the doctor. I was

wearing a tampon at the time when all of sudden the power of a contraction pushed the tampon out and blood splattered all over the floor as I ran to the bathroom. For the next three hours, I had contractions every minute. There was constant pain but at every 60 second mark I felt the most pain I have felt in my life. Large amounts of blood, clumps, large masses, and shapes of things I didn't understand came out of me with each contraction. I took another extra-strength Tylenol that the Doctor had recommended, but it did nothing for me. It was unsafe to be alone in my own home as this was happening. Finally at 2:00 am, the contractions ended.

It was the third week of August. My summer had passed me by. I was severely anxious. I don't think I can accurately explain in words how angry, desperate, hopeless and alone I felt throughout that month and a half. I was made to feel like I could not speak out about the way I was neglected and abused. I was suppressing intense feelings of anger and fear, that I felt reckless and was self-destructive. My work was suffering due to my daily nausea. Mentally, it is still an ongoing process of recovery.

The help that is available on PEI is unfortunately a system that perpetuates the culture of shame in itself. Anonymity, secrecy, no open dialogue, no place to go, no clear safe support. Not only does this secrecy make the process that much more difficult for women, but it creates a shameful silence where you can't speak up for yourself or ask for help when you really need it.

Give Islanders local, safe abortion access now. Women's lives have and
continue to be threatened.