

An eight-step plan to advocate for comprehensive medical student teaching on abortion

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Background

Exposing medical students to **comprehensive teaching on abortion** :

increases access to safe abortion and decreases morbidity and mortality related to unsafe abortion ✓

fosters **conscientious commitment** to abortion care, which helps **sustain the workforce** ✓

prepares students to **provide competent abortion-related care** when they qualify ✓ [i]

Students view abortion as **essential** part of healthcare and want **teaching**

BUT

Abortion often **not** included in curricula...
... and if it is, it often focuses on **ethico-legal** not **clinical** aspects

Multiple barriers faced by educators

Lack of curriculum time

Lack of relevant teaching expertise

Minimal clinical opportunities

Abortion perceived as sensitive topic

[ii], [iii], [iv]

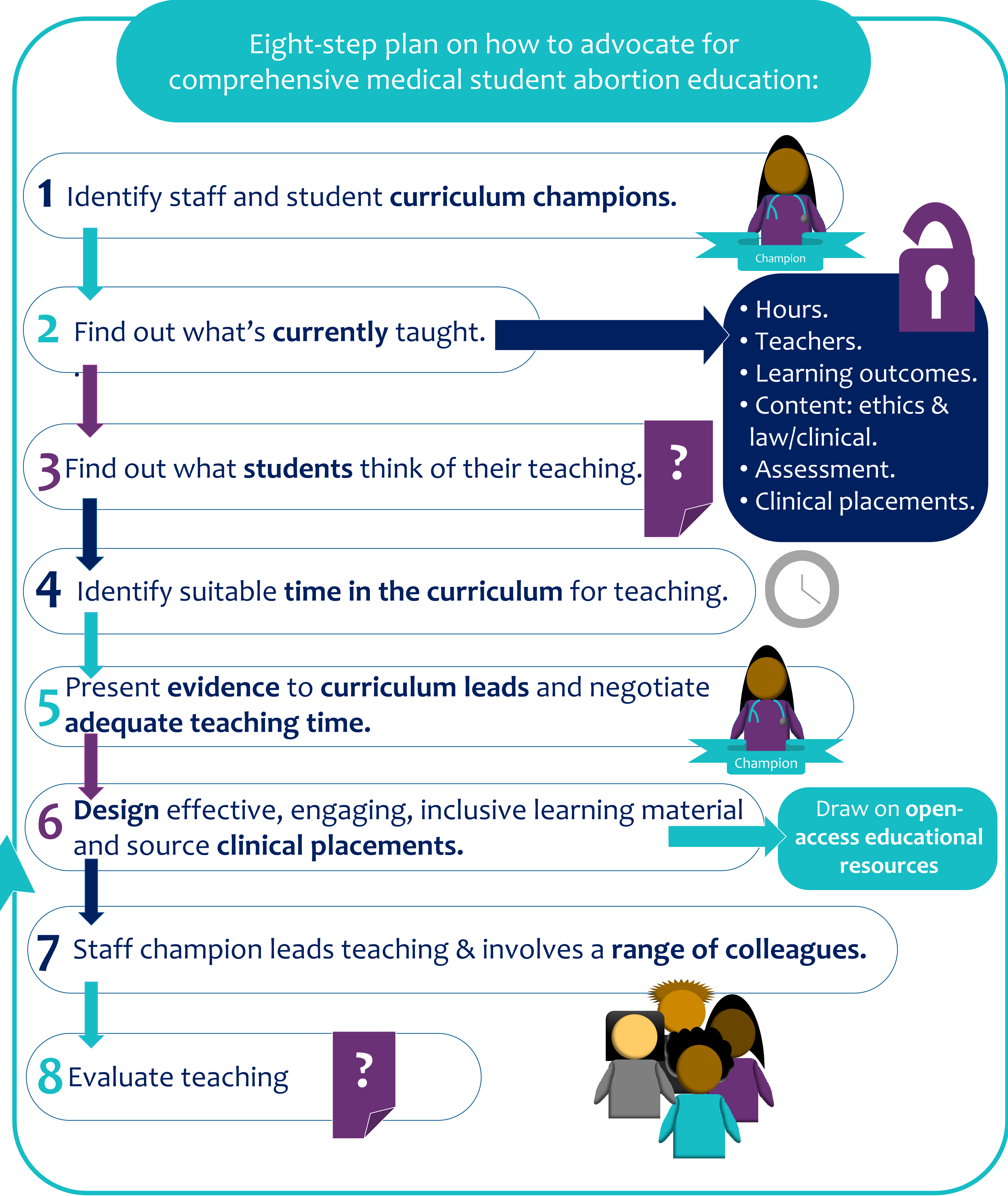
Objective

To design and pilot a **project for improving medical school teaching** on abortion care.

Method

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- In Nov 2021 RCOG’s Making Abortions Safe programme and Doctors for Choice UK (DfCUK) designed an **eight-step plan** on how to improve abortion education.
- In Jan 2022 DfCUK recruited **40 volunteer healthcare providers** and **medical students** to its **Curriculum Champions project**.
- Champions are being supported to work through the **eight-step plan** with their **local medical schools** with the aim of introducing **comprehensive abortion teaching** in the 2022/23 academic year.



Results

- Ongoing national roll-out of the Curriculum Champions project.
- Currently Champions working with 18 medical schools.
- Curriculum Champions progress by May 2022 – 18 responses (45% of Champions) so far:

Since commencement of the project, have you engaged with any curriculum leads within your medical school?

23.5% Yes

76.5% No

If not, why not?

“Still in discussions”

“... the head of ethics is on secondment”

“Finding the right person who can say yes!”

“Meeting with curriculum lead was delayed but seems on board”

“... there is not much scope for adding in extra teaching”

Has any additional curriculum time for abortion teaching been secured?

11.8% Yes

23.5% No

64.7% Don't know

If yes, in what years has additional time been secured?

“Clinical years”

“Year 1”

“Year 5”

“Year 4”

What has been the most useful aspect of the Curriculum Champions project?

“Opening dialogue with the university”

“Hearing what is provided at other medical schools across the country to be able to benchmark”

“Brainstorming with other people concurrently working on project to identify common pitfalls/hurdles”

“... involvement from doctors, as opposed to the project being led only by students. It gives us a lot more gravitas!”

“Having collaborative weight and backing of national project with trusted affiliations”

“Suggested teaching materials”

“Having a network”

What ongoing support would you like the Curriculum Champions project to provide?

“Sharing resources and tips”

“... guidance on including [abortion] in summative assessments”

“Continue to meet to discuss strategies and share experiences”

“pre-recorded lecture from pro-life perspective”

“Providing sessions for the champions to share with the university It may help them acknowledge the educational shortcoming.”

Further resources

Innovative teaching resource: Why We Provide – video <https://vimeo.com/453594455>

Doctors for Choice UK

More information: RCOG Making Abortion Safe Teaching healthcare students about abortion e-learning module: <https://elearning.rcog.org.uk/tutorials/making-abortion-safe-programme/safe-abortion-care-resources/teaching-healthcare-students>

Doctors for Choice UK Education website: <https://doctorsforchoiceuk.com/education>

[i] Steinauer J, DePíñeres T. The importance of including abortion in undergraduate medical education. In: Landy U, Darney PD, Steinauer J (Eds). Advancing women’s health through medical education. CUP; 2021. pp.143–50.
[ii] Horan C, Zadeh PG, Rennison C, Hoggart L, Kavanagh J. A qualitative analysis of medical students’ attitudes to abortion education in UK medical schools. *BMJ Sex Reprod Health.* 31 Jan 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsexrh-2021-201385>.
[iii] Rennison C, Woodhead EJ, Horan C, Lohr PA, Kavanagh J. Abortion education in UK medical schools: a survey of medical educators. *BMJ Sex Reprod Health.* 4 Apr 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsexrh-2021-201387>.
[iv] Cohen P, Mayhew J, Gishen F, Potts HWW, Lohr PA, Kavanagh J. What should medical students be taught about abortion? An evaluation of student attitudes towards their abortion teaching and their future involvement in abortion care. *BMC Medical Education.* 2021; 21(1),4.