

RCOG Making Abortion Safe Programme: healthcare professionals advocating for quality abortion care

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Making Abortion Safe

RCOG's global initiative to advocate for women's health

Background

Unsafe abortion remains one of the top five causes of maternal mortality worldwide. Each year, around 220 women die for every 100000 unsafe abortions in developing regions due to barriers to accessing safe and respectful abortion services, including restrictive laws, health system and community factors¹. Healthcare professionals are uniquely placed as advocates to improve access to quality abortion care.

Objective

Quality abortion care is a WHO listed essential health service, and should be; effective, efficient, accessible, acceptable/patient centred, equitable and safe. However quality abortion care remains contingent on legal, regulatory, policy, socio-economic and socio-cultural systems, which in the majority of contexts interact to create barriers to access. As a result, an estimated 45% of all abortions between 2010-2014 were unsafe.



Mildred Mushunje – SRHR Champion, Zimbabwe

“In Zimbabwe, some of the challenges women face regarding their health arise due to the lack of knowledge and access to quality healthcare services...various religious and cultural factors act as barriers for women and girls. Being an SRHR Champion working with The RCOG’s Making Abortion Safe Programme has been extremely rewarding. Together with The RCOG, we’ve created synergies and networks with SRHR champions in Rwanda, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. These synergies have allowed us to collaborate and leverage our complementary skills, expertise and knowledge to advance women’s health and rights in various countries ...”

Design

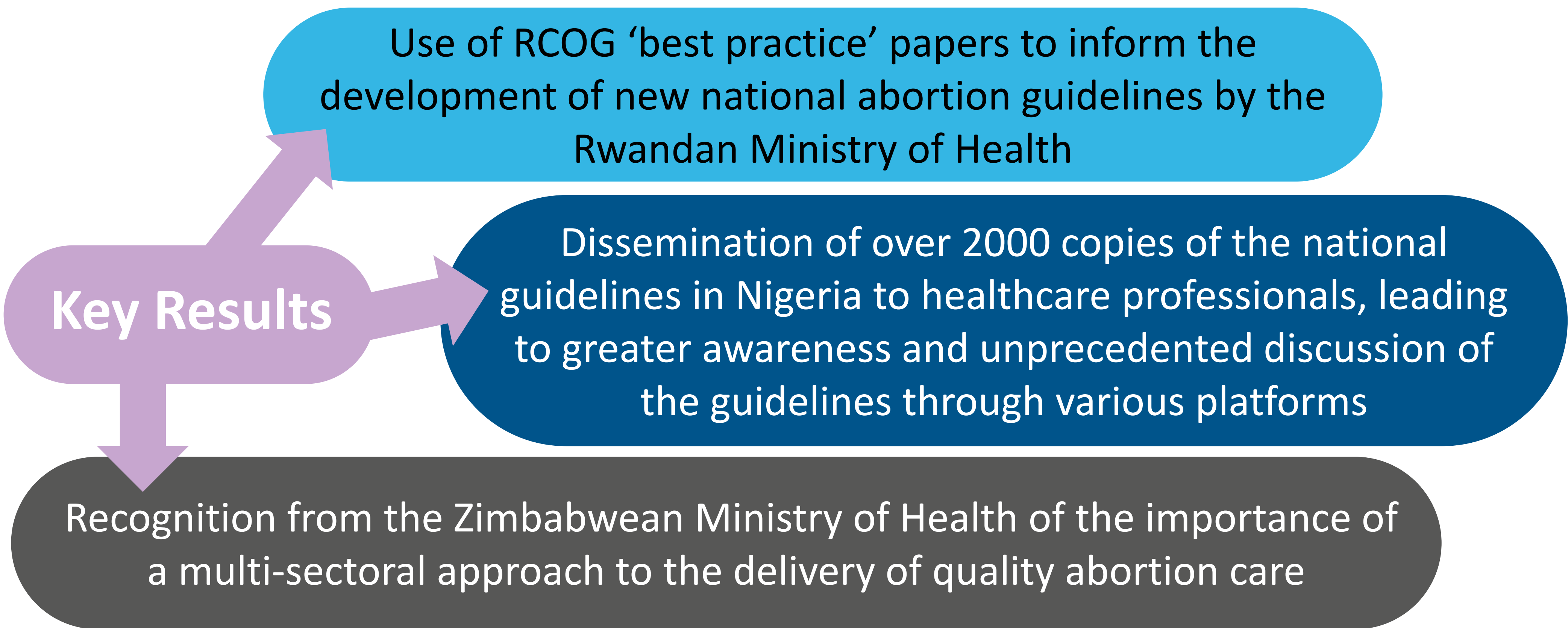
Recognising that obstetricians and gynaecologists, and affiliated health professionals (HCPs), are uniquely placed as advocates, the RCOG designed a 3-year multi-country programme to advocate for improved access to quality abortion care.

Method

60+ Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights “Champions” were appointed from a self-selected pool of HCPs from across Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, Sudan and Sierra Leone. Champions were supported to analyse their abortion care ecosystem and develop unique advocacy plans to tackle barriers to access. Implementation was over 3 years with monthly review and quarterly cross-country learning meetings held online.

Results

Common themes identified for advocacy across the countries were; awareness of the grounds permitted to provide abortion amongst HCPs, use of national guidelines and ‘best practice’ papers; inclusion of abortion care in medical curricular and in-service trainings and addressing abortion related stigma.



Conclusions

- Healthcare professionals who are committed to improving women’s health through access to quality abortion care are ideally placed as advocates as they are respected and provide a legitimate voice to both policy makers and communities.
- As such they can be instrumental in identifying and developing strategies to help address barriers to care.
- Through collaborating with these professionals to coordinate efforts and providing technical support, guidance and financing for their work, professional bodies can positively contribute towards efforts to achieve global equity in access to abortion care.

¹. WHO. Abortion. World Health Organization. Published 2021. Accessed January 26, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion>

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