

Abortion ban a bitter pill to swallow, say campaigners

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Some of the Pro Choice activists including Ruth Coppinger TD (left) and Rita Harrold, RITA organiser, (right) at Connolly Station in Dublin yesterday. Photo: Steve Humphreys

A GROUP of pro-choice campaigners took banned abortion pills after travelling over the Border by train to collect them from the North.

Socialist TD Ruth Coppinger took the "safe, non-surgical abortion pill" during a rally held outside Connolly Station in Dublin yesterday afternoon, after the group of 30 campaigners returned from collecting the abortion pills in Belfast.

They had ordered them online on 'Women on Web' and had them delivered to addresses in the North.

A number of women from pro-choice campaigns, including ROSA, Action for Choice and Real Productive Health, also took the abortion pill, which is illegal to purchase here. None of the women who took the pills is currently pregnant.

The Dublin-West representative said their journey to Belfast was an attempt to re-enact the contraceptive train of the 1970s, and they were joined by several other TDs, including the recently elected Paul Murphy, Richard Boyd Barrett and Joe Higgins.

"The main purpose of this event was to highlight the ongoing hypocrisy of the ban on abortion in this country. Because, despite the ban, thousands of women leave the country every year, or go to the North to collect these pills, and that's not going to stop by banning abortion," the mother of one said.

"We need to repeal the eighth amendment (to the Constitution) now and it's absolutely urgent for women's health and lives."

Ms Coppinger said young women were "not willing to sit idly by" and were calling for a referendum on the issue to be held early next year.

Caroline Simons from the Pro-Life Campaign described Ms Coppinger's decision to take the abortion pill as "reckless" and "a cynical publicity stunt".

"It is a publicity stunt, it is illegal for good reason, to protect the health and welfare of women," she added.

However, Deputy Paul Murphy defended the women who chose to publicly take the abortion pill in the city centre yesterday, describing it as a "defiant stance".

"The reason that people took the pill, even though they are not pregnant, is to show that they are perfectly safe, because the idea out there is that they are very dangerous," he said.

Meanwhile, Master of the Rotunda Hospital, Dr Sam Coulter Smith, said any woman suffering complications as a result of taking abortion pills should not be afraid to seek medical help.

"One of our concerns would be if someone thinks they have done something wrong, or they feel that they have done something that is illegal, then they may be slow to present to the hospital," he said.

"Our role in the situation is to support people and to treat people. It's not to be judgmental."

Dr Coulter Smith said that although the risk of something going wrong was low, the consequences if it did go wrong could be fairly severe: "For example, if you have got somebody who had a previous C-section, if you have got somebody who has had a scar on their uterus from an operation...then in those particular situations, the risk of uterine rupture is increased."

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