

Seek help if abortion pill leads to issues - top doctor



Pro Choice activists after arriving from Belfast after bringing back abortion pills denied to women in the Republic of Ireland at Connolly Station, Dublin. Photo: Gareth Chaney Collins

By Fiona Dillon - 29 October 2014 06:30 AM

THE Master of the Rotunda hospital has urged that any women suffering complications as a result of taking abortion pills should not be afraid to seek medical help.

Dr Sam Coulter Smith said the role of doctors is to support and treat women who may have taken the pills, "not to be judgemental".

He made his remarks on the day that pro-choice activists recreated the landmark contraceptive train of the 1970s by travelling to Belfast to bring back abortion pills that cannot be sold south of the border.

Up to 30 women travelled on the "abortion pill train" to collect pills they had ordered online and had delivered to addresses in the North.

Socialist Party TD Ruth Coppinger was among a number of women who took one of the unauthorised pills when they arrived back in Dublin.

Organisers said the trip, which also marked the second anniversary of the death of Savita Halappanavar, was held to show there is "a safe, non-surgical abortion pill" available and to defy Ireland's abortion laws, which they said criminalise women.

More than 1,000 abortion pills have been seized in Ireland this year, mostly as they arrived into the country via mail order.

Dr Coulter Smith told the Herald that his staff see women on a "fairly regular" basis who have taken abortion pills.

"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 judgemental, and it's important that is understood.

"So if people have gone down the route of taking these tablets, if they feel the situation is complicated, then they should present to the hospital and not be reluctant to come."

Taking the abortion pills has the effect of causing uterine bleeding.

"One of the problems is you don't know how severe that bleeding is going to be, or how long it's going to go on for," said Dr Coulter Smith.

"And obviously, a situation like that then needs to be managed.

Dr Coulter Smith said that although the risk of something going wrong is low, the consequences if it does go wrong can 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 such as a myomectomy for fibroids, if somebody has had a complicated termination, then in those particular situations the risk of uterine rupture is increased," he said.

concern

He added that the number of Irish women who present with complications after taking abortion pills is hard to quantify.

"They are presenting as an incomplete miscarriage, and you probably won't know whether or not they have taken tablets, unless they tell you," he said.

"It's always a concern when people resort to taking medication in an unregulated manner. It's a problem that we need to try and find a solution for, and I think it's up to the legislators to try and find a way through this."

hnews@herald.ie