MOBILE HEALTH APPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND INFORMATION ABOUT SAFE ABORTION

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With support from a junior investigator award from The Society of Family Planning, Dr. Caitlin Gerdts has collaborated with Samsara, a safe-abortion hotline in Indonesia—where abortion is illegal and smartphones are widespread—to conduct formative research to inform the development of content for the first ever smartphone application for medication abortion. Seed funding from the University of California, San Francisco, has enabled work with software developers to build a beta version of a smartphone app. The app, currently in the design phase, will include features such as mobile avatars to accompany women through the process of medication abortion self-induction, push notifications for medication reminders, supportive in-app messages, image-based instructions on proper dosage and administration of medical abortion, photographs of locally branded generic misoprostol and mifepristone, photographs and warnings about impostor drugs, information about normal side-effects, information and instructions about when to seek care, and geo-coded maps for local health facilities.

This is the first known smartphone intervention to be developed for improving access to, or providing information about, safe abortion. There is great potential for mobile technologies to bridge gaps in safe abortion access and provide new avenues for harm reduction, and there is a pressing need for research to demonstrate the feasibility of these approaches.