

Abortion Bill - Jacinta Le Page
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(singing) "Australian's all let us rejoice for we are young and ..."

I hesitate to sing the next word due to the restraints I understand that are being legislated over my conscience.

Hi, I'm Jacinta, and with me here are some of my fellow colleagues who would like to stress our concerns. We acknowledge some here are not doctors yet, but eagerly await the day when we can serve our community.

I have received much input from the media, the community, and even lecturers in relation to this Bill. I have read it over and over, and from my young perspective, believe that many of these people seem to misunderstand the significance and ramifications. We are gravely concerned about what this means for our careers!

Firstly, referring personally to another medical practitioner, as this Bill states, seems to be clearly participating in abortion. In our classes in medical school, it has been taught to refer is to simply hint or name-under-our-breath the Royal Women's Hospital, and the woman we are counselling will understand immediately where she is to go to get her abortion. This has been suggested as a way of getting around the conscience clause. However, this seems disingenuous to me. It does not acknowledge what it means to refer. Nor does it give weight to the gravity of what this procedure means to myself. But we must refer to another health colleague which is far more personal and involving. Furthermore, we fear we will be required to research for a colleague who will readily 'help' her have an abortion. Such a personal referral equals participation in the killing.

Secondly, we fear the deep compromise we will be required to undergo. We are not training to be machine operators or robots. We are trained to deal with life and death, difficult decisions, communicate and respect patients and their loved ones from all cultures and walks of life. We are trained to consider and grapple with the implications treatment decisions, complications and side effects. We are taught to be honest with our patients, yet compassionate. To become such a doctor requires integrity and conscience. However, we understand this bill will force us to detach ourselves. But our core, our conscience, is more than just a separate and external compartment to our practice of medicine – it is the foundation of our being. It is what drives and determines our everyday decisions, as we deal with patients in all different circumstances. Please, Members of Parliament, do not force us to merely operate in a system, rather than engage as a person! Please, do not strip us of our freedom to exercise our deepest commitment to practising medicine – saving and improving the quality of life.

Thirdly, we fear the potential of this Bill to divide, and estranges us from our colleagues. Unity and teamwork are of vital importance in the world of learning and practising medicine – to care for the patient holistically. If the law doesn't reflect respect for one's desire to not be involved at all, then we are concerned this may filter into our future workplaces, and divide us from our colleagues respect, which currently unifies us in comradeship and teamwork. It has already affected some of us as students, without even passing through government! I have already experienced estrangement, conflict and abuse, and I am only a fifth year student. We are concerned that it may identify us and singles us out. It may cultivate group pressure within the medical team in which we work, where failure to participate is resented. In addition, our disagreement with abortion, when it is so universally permissible in our State's legislation, may easily be read as disagreeing with our colleagues work and efforts.

Given the above concerns, we may strongly consider training in different specialties – which would only heighten the shortage of GPs and the like. Or, as I am interested in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, we may consider training elsewhere. I am concerned I may be better off training in a different state. This is very significant to me! In this state, we boast, "Victoria, the place to Be". Please, let legislation reflect this, and not stifle the students and doctors of the future!