I: So thank you for taking part – I really appreciate your time as well.

Pearce: Oh you’re welcome, you’re welcome.

I: If you don’t mind then we’ll just get started.

Pearce: Yep.

I: OK, so can you tell me a bit about your role with regards to advising women who are seeking termination of pregnancy?

Pearce: In my field, probably the main 1 would be people coming in for emergency contraception – whether that’s within the 3 day or the 5 day window; for the tablet form of that. So, we get that a lot. We do get that a lot. By that point, I have never had any kinda interactions with women wishing to terminate by that point. Just to give like immediate contraception.

I: And have you ever had any issues with giving that out – any sorta drawbacks or anything at all?

Pearce: From me personally?

I: Yeah….

Pearce: No. No.

I: OK. So, are your views quite liberal would you say?

Pearce: What does liberal mean? [laughs]

I: Well….if a person is coming to you with an issue, are you quite happy to sort that issue; to give out that emergency contraception?

Pearce: As long as they’re competent and you can tell that they can understand what they’re doing….if they’re in a competent mind that they can understand like what this is going to do ‘cos obviously they might not be pregnant at that point it’s just that they may be. So if somebody is competent and they understand what the outcome of that is, then yeah I’m happy to give it. Yep.

I: OK.

Pearce: I’ve never had anybody young or that in my practise….

I: Really, so has it all been kinda older?

P: Yeah like 16 and over….never kinda younger girls….

I: So contrary to what information sometimes is out there in the media, it can be quite different?

P: Oh no – I would say majority of the women are in their late 20s/30s….

I: OK. That’s interesting. Along the way people have said there is sorta conflicting information out there….

P: Yeah. I’ve never had anybody like 12/13 ‘cos if there were I’d have to do an additional competency and there would need to be an adult with them plus we’d need to notify the appropriate people if there was anybody that age and I’ve never had to….

I: See if you did, would you be comfortable enough with that?

P: With giving it at that age?

I: Mhmm….

P: They would need to have an adult with them to start….somebody….then we would need to report it at that age.

I: OK. Looking at personal and professional differences – obviously you’re a health professional and you have your views as a person in your own right as well….do you think it’s fair to say that if a health professional wanted to opt out….you know if a health professional wanted to opt out of participating in that process….do you think that’s OK?

P: Mmmmm….No.

I: Have you ever had any experience of that from colleagues?

P: No….no.

I: OK

P: I think if somebody is coming to you for help and you’ve got the ability to give them that….I mean I’ve been a young girl in that situation myself and if the thing you’re terrified about is becoming pregnant and it’s the last thing that you want to happen to you at that moment in your life and somebody refuses to help you….I mean that’s a lot to put on to somebody. Somebody young or really depending on you in a certain circumstance….like an abusive relationship, I mean you don’t really know what’s going on outside so I think if somebody comes to you looking for help and you’ve got the ability to do it….I mean not necessarily it’s gonna work, but if you have a step to play in that then I think you should do it.

I: Yeah. So that brings me to the whole participation element. What would you constitute as participation? Within the termination process?

P: Of me?

I: Just in general….what do you think constitutes participation in abortion? Like….would it be?

P: I’m not very good at stuff like this [laughs]

I: You know it’s because like if it’s something you’ve not totally thought of right through….

P: My participation or anyone’s?

I: Let’s think yours 1st….so if somebody comes to you for advice, so even at the point of giving advice, would you say that’s active participation?

P: Yes. Yes.

I: OK….because some people might say well if I’m just speaking to them about it I’m not hands on participating….right?

P: Mhmm….well I would say if you’re speaking to them about it then you are participating because they’re gonna go away and they’re gonna take what you said so you could’ve planted thoughts, you’ve given advice….so you’ve became part of that. You could even say people coming in here and they’re just wanting to speak to me about a code or something so then I do that and they go away; that’s still participation there ‘cos you’ve participated in that – that’s an event that’s happened.

I: So because of the interaction?

P: Interaction yeah. So if somebody is coming in and asking about it then I would regard that as participation.

I: Right. So, if – like a scenario, right? If somebody had to come in and the pharmacist had said I’m not quite comfortable dispensing this medication, checking it off and giving it out – I don’t believe I can help this person because it would affect me, impact on my conscience – you know when it comes to their beliefs….what would you think about that? Would you think that person also has a right to withdraw?

P: That is hard. But you come in to this job knowing that services like this are in place….so I mean if you are that strongly viewed then maybe this career is not for you. That’s my point on that.

I: Yeah.

P: I think if you can’t give that service – these services are in place to help people – and if your views are that strong that you can’t do that, then community is not the best for you….

I: And if somebody had emergency contraception that hadn’t worked, so the next step was gonna be abortion….would you be quite comfortable signposting on to the appropriate place to get that help?

P: Yeah.

I: Like to a GP, or clinic…?

P: Yeah. Yes.

I: Are you quite happy that within your field there’s enough there to support you to signpost on effectively?

P: Yeah. I could definitely find the – even if I wasn’t permanently in the area, you could Google and find the nearest women’s health clinic and even ask them to go to their GP and find out there….

I: OK. So, again you don’t have a problem with that side of things?

P: No.

I: OK, which brings me to your own personal views on abortion as a topic. How do you feel about that?

P: I’m very….I don’t want to say pro-abortion, but if that is what the person, the woman wants or needs, then I think up to a certain point then yeah….

I: So the point being the gestation period?

P: Yeah

I: Do you think there should be a definite cut off?

P: I do think there should be, yeah.

I: A lot just now particularly in different countries and things, we’re seeing the scope is getting wider?

P: So what is it now….it’s 24? Yeah 24….I mean I’m totally pro-abortion definitely, but I do also then feel that after a certain point, then when everything is formed, then it’s a bit different at that point because – I don’t know why I feel like that because technically it is a child from the start – you know looking at it that way when women are pregnant they’re like I’ve got a child even when it’s minute, tiny….but I just feel like from a certain point then there should be a cut off.

I: Mhmm….does it conjure up an image…?

P: Yeah I think it is the image and like a pregnant woman standing with a big belly….it’s probably that image and after that point….I also think that period is there, so unless they’ve found out like a week before that cut off period, if you’ve known….say you’re 8 weeks pregnant and then you have that 16 weeks to decide what you want to do about this, so it’s not as if somebody’s maybe not all people….but the majority of women will have had that time to decide….so if you get to that point and you’ve not made that decision, I feel that maybe your decision has already been made.

I: Sub-consciously, or unconsciously or whatever? That makes sense. Where would you say your views and beliefs and things….would you say they’ve changed over time? Or stayed the same? You know, as you’ve gone on in your career?

P: No….I think they’ve always stayed the same

I: They’ve not like strengthened in certain parts?

P: Maybe strengthened but not changed….I don’t know if it’s career wise I personally have had an abortion….

I: Right. OK.

P: So I think that maybe is why I feel….it was the worst thing that ever happened to me….I was in a horrible relationship – the worst and having that was the best decision, like hands down I know that – so that reflects my views because I knew how horrible I felt and this was going to ruin my life….

I: Thanks for sharing that

P: It doesn’t upset me or anything and I think that’s why my beliefs….’cos I’ve been in that situation….

I: So, your empathy for somebody in that situation will be heightened because you can say I’ve been there?

P: Totally, yeah….that’s why I said to you ‘cos I feel like you need to get the true story - maybe you would be like why are her views so strong!

I: No, I’m just thankful and grateful to you for sharing….

P: I’m quite an open person, so that’s alright….

I: Which is great here….

P: I just feel like if that is the best thing that’s going to happen for you then you should have that choice….

I: So is it circumstantial and very much a personal choice?

P: Yep, totally….

I: And whether we like it or not, there’s a lot of judgement out there. And also like what we were saying about sorta like wrong information….there’s so much open access nowadays with the internet and social media and….

P: Social media and there’s always somebody there to judge everything you do….

I: So – education, maybe if we educated appropriately, as in if we were more open about it, do you think that would have a positive impact?

P: Absolutely. It’s such a taboo subject and nobody wants to discuss abortion and that – well me personally, I didn’t tell any of my family because I was scared of how they were going to react to me doing this….

I: Was it like the judgement?

P: Yeah, yeah and my sister has 3 kids and she’s always been like a mum – 1 of those mumsy very maternal….so I had the fear that if I told my parents or my sister then they would pressure me in to not doing it. So I kept it to myself, but I told my best friend

I: Did you have support there?

P: Oh totally yeah, my friends are great. It was just the fear of them saying you can’t do this, whereas I knew it was what I had to do – it is totally a taboo thing….

I: It is and maybe if we did have – well along the way different HCPs have mentioned the role of education and some have said like some initiatives that have come out have been sorta knocked back because….which….

P: I think education is a big thing – people just think oh they can’t be bothered with a baby – maybe more like older generations….it’s not always that I mean there’s other reasons. You need to look at all aspects and I also think that women aren’t put on this earth just to have children….if you don’t want to have children and you happen to fall pregnant, I think it is your right, even if there’s no other circumstances – even if that’s just what you want for your life, maybe even at that moment in time….I think that you’ve got the right to do something about that

I: And the choice?

P: Yeah and the choice, yeah….

I: Having the right professional advice as well, which I imagine you did? The proper guidance….

P: Oh totally, yeah….

I: You didn’t come across any CO or that?

P: Nope, nothing like that

I: So you felt supported?

P: Totally, yeah….

I: Which a lot of people might not get….

P: Yeah. But my experience was fine – everybody was lovely to me from the minute I went….

I: Do you think that mad such a difference?

P: Yeah, totally. I think if somebody had been like – well I was 21 at the time and that’s still young; you’re still a young girl and emmm….if well the women were lovely to me, so nice and couldn’t have been nicer. I think if I’d have been met with something other than that it would put me off and make me feel judged. Totally judged.

I: So 1 of the most important things….well a commonality that’s been discussed is the whole judgement thing. But on the same score, for a conscientious objector….what do you think might make them object to taking part?

P: Me? I’d say religious reasons would be the main 1. Emmm….morals and. When I went for it it was all like white women – not that I’m being racist or anything but that’s the way it was. I also think like I’m touching on the topic and like everyone was lovely to me – people in that role should have those qualities; they need to make sure that they’ve no objections to that so if they’re putting people forward then they’ve got to do a proper evaluation of these people….to make sure they’re going to be competent in doing that.

I: So maybe like in the future….sorta bring up the conscience clause and duty of care of a HCP….like are there any boundaries? It is a very grey area….so possibly when studying – maybe at that stage bringing it up then? Or even – well it might affect their judgement then of what they’re going to specialise in?

P: Yeah….exactly – whether they’re going to leave that topic alone and focus on something else? Yeah. Definitely.

I: And going for interviews and things, like having that discussion with potential employees as well?

P: Yeah and seeing what their views are….

I: So on the whole, is it fair to say that you think it should be more open? We should talk about it more?

P: Yeah. If somebody wants to talk about it then yeah. I think we should talk about it more, I think we should be emmm….discussed. Like 2 years ago I ended up in [name of hospital] well they thought I had a cyst in my ovaries; but I didn’t – ended up it was food poisoning. It was horrific, I genuinely thought I was going to die. But when they thought it was a cyst in my ovaries, they took me for an internal examination and they asked me if I had an abortion and I was like yeah….they were like that’s fine, I’ve never been met with any kinda reaction other than that….but if I was met with a different reaction then that would make anybody feel bad. Like they’re judging me because I’ve had an abortion. Whereas….you don’t hold back then.

I: So treating it like every person is an individual?

P: Yeah in that kinda situation, then totally….yeah. It can be completely different and I think if every person has a reason why they don’t want that then that’s their reason….

I: Is there anything else you want to add? You’ve been really open and I’m really grateful for that because it makes a difference….

P: I said earlier on I’m going to just say because it gives you it all rather than half the picture….

I: Yeah and it’s your experience and that’s what counts, so thank you.

P: You’re totally welcome.