

Planned Parenthood to offer abortions induced by drugs

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NEW YORK — Planned Parenthood Federation of America will begin offering drug-induced abortions this month at many of its clinics.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved a Planned Parenthood study of the two-drug abortion method. Planned Parenthood said yesterday it hopes the FDA will rule the combination safe and effective.

Seventeen of Planned Parenthood's 150 affiliates — including New York City, Long Island, San Diego, Boston-Cambridge, Houston, Phoenix and the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin — will participate initially in the study. As many as 45 affiliates may sign on by early next year, officials said.

In the drug-induced abortion method, which costs \$250 to \$350, a woman who is no more than seven weeks pregnant is injected with methotrex-

ate, which stops development of the placenta and embryo.

Four to seven days later, misoprostol tablets are inserted into her vagina, causing the uterus to contract and expel the fetus. The tablets may take two weeks or more to work.

The two drugs have long been approved by the FDA for other uses — methotrexate to treat cancer, arthritis and psoriasis, and misoprostol as an ulcer medicine — and a growing number of doctors already use them to induce abortions.

There is nothing illegal in using the drugs in this way, but some doctors may be reluctant to do so because of insurance and liability issues.

Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood of America, said the procedure could have been offered without FDA approval, "but because abortion is such a sensitive, politically charged issue, Planned Parenthood

wanted to go the extra mile."

The National Right to Life Committee condemned the method. "Methotrexate may cause serious complications for the mother and stops the breathing heart of her unborn child," said one leader, Olivia Gans.

Dr. Michael Burnhill, vice president of medical affairs for Planned Parenthood, said there are infrequent side effects — vomiting, nausea, diarrhea — from the methotrexate. Misoprostol, he said, brings on the cramping and bleeding needed to expel the embryo, as well as nausea and vomiting.

The other affiliates taking part are: Baltimore; Burlington, Vt.; Concord, Calif.; Denver; Des Moines, Iowa; Philadelphia; Plattsburgh, N.Y.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Seattle.

The FDA is considering whether to approve another abortion drug, RU-486, which is already in use in Europe.