



MARYLAND ABORTION CLINICS JEOPARDIZE WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

*By Nancy Paltell, PhD
Associate Director for Respect for Life
September 16, 2010*

Despite the pro-“choice” mantra that abortions should be “legal, safe and rare,” the recent tragedy at an Elkton abortion clinic sadly highlights the fact that Maryland is home to one of the most permissive abortion laws in the country. Even reasonable measures to protect women by properly regulating abortion clinics, which would have prevented this tragedy and far too many like it, have in the past been repeatedly rebuffed by the powerful special interests of the abortion industry in Maryland. It is time for Maryland’s lawmakers to take action to change this situation.

Maryland has in place effective health and safety regulations for most outpatient surgery clinics, known as ambulatory surgical facilities. Yet abortion clinics with one operating room are regulated not as ambulatory surgical facilities, but simply as doctors’ offices. As a result, they’re not required to have the emergency procedures and safety policies that could save a woman’s life when an abortion goes wrong. Opponents to properly regulating abortion clinics as ambulatory surgical facilities claim it’s a “singling out” of one type of surgery, abortion; in reality legislation is needed so that abortion is treated like every other invasive surgery.

The Elkton incident, which has been widely reported in the media, occurred at American Women’s Services, where Drs. Steven Brigham and Nicola Riley severely injured a woman while aborting her 21-week fetus. Ambulatory surgical facilities (ASF) must have a policy for transporting injured patients to a hospital, but this clinic had no policy. Instead of calling an ambulance, they drove the bleeding woman to a hospital in a personal vehicle. The ASF policy would have helped the receiving hospital know what to expect when a patient was transferred, but without a pre-existing agreement, time was wasted while the hospital tried to learn what happened. ASF regulations require a biennial assessment of each physician’s performance pattern to ensure competence; without regulations, authorities weren’t aware that Dr. Brigham had lost his medical license in several states and was not licensed in Maryland.

Maryland abortion clinics have been repeatedly sued by women who were injured, and in some tragic cases, by the families of women who have died from their injuries. Licensing abortion clinics as ASFs would have prevented many of the injuries sustained by Maryland women.

Contrast the “care” given at abortion clinics to that of pregnancy resource centers. Pregnancy centers offer women facing an unplanned pregnancy the love and support they need to choose childbirth instead of abortion. Many women consider abortion because they feel they have no choice; pregnancy centers show that adoption and parenting are viable options. By helping women get prenatal care, find housing, learn vocational skills, and obtain whatever they need to become self-sufficient, pregnancy centers empower women to make life-affirming choices. And, no one has been harmed at a pregnancy resource center.

Yet ironically, some Maryland jurisdictions erroneously believe women must be protected from pregnancy centers. They have tried to impose onerous restrictions on charities that provide free help to pregnant women in need, while allowing abortion clinics to operate without oversight.

For the health and safety of women, it’s time to insist that Maryland abortion clinics be regulated as ambulatory surgical facilities. Clinics that refuse to follow the regulations should be closed. Women deserve no less.