

Found: safe, compassionate care

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The patients weren't screaming and the staff wasn't scowling. In the operating room, nurses wiped patients' brows and held their hands. The recovery room looked like a slumber party.

That's how it can be in abortion clinics. And in three Chicago clinics, that's what investigators found.

The clinics' names may not sound familiar. They don't promote themselves much. They all find advertising as "distasteful" as buying patients with kickbacks and selling abortions or any other procedure to women who don't need them.

During a five-month investigation by The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn., reporters and researchers worked undercover in six of the city's 13 clinics. In four of those clinics—the Michigan Av. abortion mills—we have documented how women's lives are endangered by people who care more for profits than patients.

But working undercover in two other clinics, and working in co-operation with a third, we found that abortion doesn't have to be an assembly-line operation. We found that in clinics like these, women may find safe and compassionate medical care:

- Midwest Population Center, 100 E. Ohio.
- Park Medical Center, 2814 W. Peterson.
- Concord Medical Center Inc., 17 W. Grand.

BGA Investigator Michelle Young, who witnessed poor medical care and deceptive counseling at Biogenetics Ltd., 520 N. Michigan, also worked undercover at the Midwest Population Center. Her experiences at both clinics made for some striking comparisons.

On her first day as counselor at Biogenetics, Young was instructed not to tell the patient the abortion would hurt, not to discuss the procedure in any detail and not to waste time talking about birth control.

"We don't want to tell them it hurts and we don't want to tell them too much," Young's supervisor told her, "because the patients get too nervous and afraid and will be out the door."

At the Midwest Population Center, Young's supervisor urged her to show some pretense to the door. "Don't ever hesitate to turn someone away, because some people just aren't ready for the procedure," said Young's supervisor. "If they really want it, they'll be back."

But, the supervisor added, "We don't want repeaters here." Young was told to stress the importance of birth control to her patients.

THE PHILOSOPHY at the Midwest center, Young was told, is that a woman who wants an abortion should be able to have one. But abortion must not be used as a method of birth control.

While Young had to counsel patients in big groups at Biogenetics, and was scolded for trying to counsel them individually, she and other counselors at Midwest had the luxury of at least 20 minutes alone with each patient.

And at the Midwest clinic, counselors may accompany their patients through the abortions. Young followed one of her patients into the operating room. There, she found not the cold, quick and often excruciating treatment women may get at Biogenetics, but a doctor who talked gently to the patient



"The atmosphere was quite relaxed. Patients chat among themselves and everyone seemed to be in a good mood. I never once heard a patient cry out in pain."



PARK MEDICAL CENTER, owned by Eileen Adams, co-operated with The Sun-Times and the BGA in the abortion-mill investigation by allowing us to observe first-hand how a proper clinic should be operated.

How to choose abortion clinic

What do you need to know about a clinic before making an appointment for an abortion?

In a booklet called, "How to Choose an Abortion Facility," the National Abortion Federation, 110 E. 59th St., New York, suggests a laundry list of questions a woman may want to ask before selecting a clinic.

Some of the most important questions include:

- What pregnancy tests are done?
- Does the clinic give Rhogam injections, if a patient has RH-negative blood, to prevent problems with future pregnancies?
- What are the qualifications of counselors? Does the clinic offer individual or group counseling?
- Who is the doctor? What are his quali-

cations? How much experience has he had performing abortions?

- Can you get local or general anesthetic?
- Is the recovery room equipped with beds, cots, or reclining chairs? How long can you stay in the recovery room?
- Is there a 24-hour phone number you can call in case of emergencies?
- How much does the abortion cost, and what are the added costs for Rhogam, general anesthetic or other pain-killers?
- Does the facility provide birth control counseling and services?

Whenever possible it is suggested prospective patients talk with other women who have had an abortion there to get their impression of the facility.

throughout the operation.

Unlike some of the doctors on the abortion assembly lines, doctors at Midwest apparently take time to open the mouth of the uterus slowly and wait for anesthetics to take effect before the actual abortion begins.

THE DOCTOR YOUNG observed spent several minutes talking to the patient, and nearly 10 minutes on the physical procedure that some Biogenetics doctors do, in three

minutes.

"The [Midwest] doctor explained each step as he went along," Young said. "He warned the patient when it was going to hurt, how it would feel, how long the pain would last. And all the while, the nurse held the patient's hand or stroked her hair."

At one Michigan Av. abortion mill, we saw a doctor rush from abortion to abortion without washing his hands or donning sterile

Twelfth in a series

gloves. At another clinic, we saw a doctor perform abortions in street clothes without scrubbing.

But at the Midwest clinic, sterile conditions are diligently guarded. When a nurse accidentally touched the doctor's hand during an abortion, Young saw the doctor rush from the room, scrub his hands and put on new sterile gloves before proceeding.

AT ONE CLINIC where we worked undercover, the Michigan Avenue Medical Center, 30 S. Michigan, sterile conditions were so haphazardly maintained that operating rooms were only casually cleaned between some abortions and bloody sheets were not changed on recovery room beds.

Because there is no rush at Midwest—the clinic only does 15 abortions a day—there was no hurry to speed patients in and out of the recovery room, Young said.

In the Midwest recovery room, Young saw patients resting at least an hour. "The atmosphere was quite relaxed. Patients chat among themselves and everyone seemed to be in a good mood."

At Biogenetics, where as many as 90 patients may get abortions in a single day, the recovery room was crowded and women often were crying. There, patients are pushed out of the recovery room after 15 minutes. After that, Young found, the beds are needed for the next group.

During the month Young worked at the Midwest center, she said, "I never once heard a patient cry out in pain. At Biogenetics, I heard it all the time."

The Concord Medical Center may be the busiest abortion clinic in Chicago. Yet, unlike some of their Michigan Av. competitors, Concord's owners do not advertise and do not pay doctors or referral agents for sending them patients.

Some Concord patients come from Planned Parenthood or the Health Evaluation Referral Service (HERS), two of the city's most respected referral agencies. Neither of them charge for their referrals, but send women only to clinics whose operations they know and monitor. Other Concord patients are sent by private physicians. Still others walk in off the street.

What women find inside are friendly receptionists, thoughtful counselors and a qualified medical staff.

THE CONCORD CLINIC performs more than 150 abortions a week. And while even the staff occasionally objects to the volume, the quality of care is apparently not diminished by the numbers of patients.

Dr. Nader Bozorgi, part-owner and medical director of the clinic, said he tries to limit the number of abortions he and his doctors perform each day. He tries to ensure none of his doctors does more than 15 abortions a day. "If we do more than that, doctors get tired," he said, "and we risk mistakes."

"I'm responsible for all Concord patients," Bozorgi added. "I make sure that every one of my doctors knows what he is doing."

The Concord staff also makes sure the patient knows what she is doing before she consents to an abortion. She is not given an abortion on the same day she finds out she is pregnant. She must think about what she's doing at least overnight.

As Sun-Times reporter Kay Rutherford

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Meet two women who probe clinics here

They charge nothing for independent abortion-clinic recommendations; Page 60.

Clinics promote patients before profits

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discovered while working undercover as a Concord counselor-in-training, patient counseling can be so intensive it may drive patients away.

Rutherford saw the clinic bring in a Polish interpreter for one patient who was eager to sign abortion forms she did not understand. She also watched counselors probe women's motives for seeking abortions and quiz them on their answers.

ONE DAY, Rutherford overheard parts of a two-hour counseling session with a 17-year-old who had agreed to an abortion only because her mother had threatened to throw her out if she had the baby.

"I think abortion is murder," the girl told her counselor. "But what can I do?"

Had the girl been in one of the Michigan Av. mills, she probably would have been sold an abortion anyway. At Concord, she was sold on childbirth. The counselor gave the girl the names of several facilities where unwed mothers can live until their babies are born and referred her for further counseling on adoption.

Another teen-ager who, the counselor discovered, had been pressured into having an abortion by her boy friend and relatives also was referred to adoption agencies, as well as

to the Illinois Department of Public Aid for financial assistance during her pregnancy.

Rutherford also saw several women turned away because their "pregnancies" were too early to be confirmed by physicians. At some of the Michigan Av. clinics, such women are sold menstrual extractions—early abortions that cost less but which studies show often are unnecessary. At Concord, such procedures are not done.

SOME COUNSELORS complained to Rutherford that they felt rushed by the volume of patients. But, said Rutherford, "They still manage to take whatever time's needed with their patients."

"We want to be sure our patients have really thought it out," said Concord's administrator, Sherry Walker. "[Abortion] is an irreversible decision. We don't want them to make that kind of decision with their backs against the wall."

According to Bozorgi, counseling is as important to the patient's medical well-being as it is to her emotional health. "I will refuse to do an abortion on a woman who has not been counseled," he said. Unless he knows his patient has been counseled, he added, he cannot "proceed with confidence."

Rutherford watched counselors explain every aspect of the abortion in careful de-

Note to readers

Safe and compassionate abortion care is obtainable in the Chicago area. Reliable abortion counseling should be sought from family physicians. Other organizations that are prepared to respond to women's health questions are:

- Planned Parenthood Assn., 55 E. Jackson, 322-4240.
- Health Evaluation Referral Service, 2757 N. Seminary, 248-0166.
- The Women's Switchboard of the Midwest Women's Center, 800-972-5404.

tail—including the instruments to be used and the feelings to expect. Patients were warned about everything from the "cold and sticky antiseptic" before the abortion to the mental depression that may follow days later.

NURSES WEAR stethoscopes around their necks and seem to measure patients' vital signs religiously, Rutherford said. After their abortions, patients in the recovery room are carefully monitored by nurses and nurses' aides.

But with women snacking and sometimes laughing among themselves while they rest, the atmosphere of the recovery room on some days seems more social than medical.

Even so, Rutherford said, doctors do visit the recovery room to check on their patients' progress. And, according to a recent paper published by Bozorgi in a professional medical journal, most patients progress well. The doctor reported that his patient records showed a lower-than-average incidence of post-abortion complications.

The Park Medical Center is a newcomer to Chicago's abortion business. In the year it has been open, it has kept a low profile and, its owners believe, has suffered financially as a result.

Far from the fancy addresses of the abortion mills we investigated on the Magnificent Mile, Park Medical Center operates a small and unpretentious clinic on the city's Northwest Side.

Although the Park clinic performs relatively few abortions—no more than 15 a day—our survey five months ago of the city's abortion trade showed Park Medical

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