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Abortion

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pregnancies up to eight weeks of gestation. Bayta Elul, program manager of the Population Council of New York, said at the conference that nearly 2 million medical abortions — primarily using RU-486 — have already taken place in China and Europe since 1989.

Meanwhile, in this country, U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval for use of mifepristone is pending, and methotrexate and misoprostol have been studied as possible abortion alternatives since 1993 at places including the University of Rochester, according to Schaff and Eisinger.

Both drugs are already FDA-approved for other uses — methotrexate for cancer, for example, and misoprostol for ulcer prevention. They have not been officially approved for abortion, according to conference information, but may be used "off-label" for abortion.

Although a woman receives such drugs in a physician's office, the actual abortion takes place away from the office when she passes the unborn child — called "products of conception" by pro-choice doctors — from her body, according to conference organizers. A complete abortion may take up to four weeks for some women, and, in some cases, a woman may opt for a surgical abortion to complete the process if the medically induced abortion fails.

"It is true that the woman who aborts at home does view the tissue," Eisinger said. He urged conference participants to ask their patients how they feel about that in order to prepare them.

Schaff also led a conference session on how to use ultrasound imaging to detect pregnancies in the earliest stages.

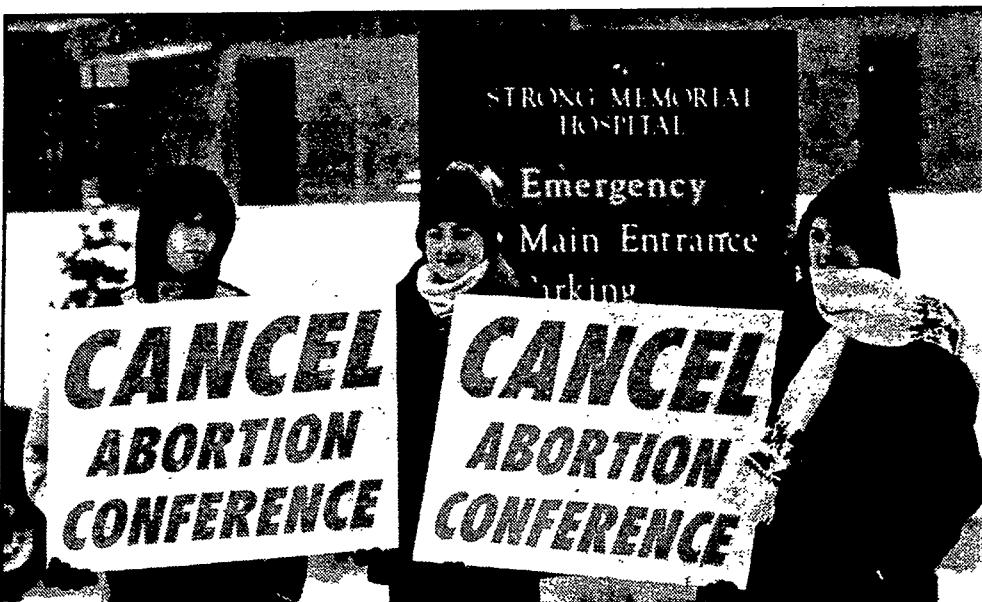
A conference on the run

From the moment it was known that it would take place, the university's medical abortion conference has drawn fire from pro-life groups, and from the Diocese of Rochester, which issued a number of statements against it. In addition, Bishop Matthew H. Clark protested the conference in a letter to a university official.

Such groups as the Lambs of Christ and the Christian American Family Life Association, would likely take as a compliment Lader's remarks about the pro-life groups' efforts to hinder the abortion conference.

"This was originally booked for the Marriott," Lader said of the conference, which drew 55 participants. "But in their demonic cleverness, (the pro-life groups) booked a room right next to us in order to shoot us down or whatever."

Indeed, two pro-life groups, the Lambs and CAFLA, which funds the Lambs, had organized a counter-conference at the Marriott Hotel in Henrietta as an alternative to the medical abortion conference, which



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

John Hayes, 22, left, with his sisters Cecelia, 14, and Kristen, 17, protest Dec. 12 against a medical abortion conference being held at Strong Medical Center, Rochester.

had originally been slated for the hotel.

The Diocese of Rochester belongs to the Monroe County Coalition for Life, an umbrella organization of pro-life activists, which planned a protest vigil outside the Marriott for the duration of the conference as well.

Within several days of learning of the CAFLA/Lambs of Christ counter-conference, the university announced it was moving the abortion conference to the medical center. A university spokesman claimed the counter-conference would distract from the abortion conference's "educational" purpose.

CAFLA and the Lambs held their conference at the Marriott on Dec. 12, and drew 150 people.

Meanwhile, Dec. 12 and 13, protesters like Melfi and Dorscheid were coming and going, to demonstrate outside the Strong Medical Center against the abortion conference.

What about the women?

Although the pro-life community views medical abortion as a direct threat to the unborn children, it also claims that such abortions are detrimental to women's health. Just how detrimental seems to be a matter of opinion, depending on what physician you ask.

Pro-choice doctors will emphasize that medical abortions have a number of short-term side effects like nausea and bleeding that eventually go away. Eisinger's research on the pain suffered by women who undertake a medical abortion came to these conclusions:

- Almost all women experience crampy pain.
- There is a rough correlation between gestational age and increased pain.
- Intense pain lasts 15 to 30 minutes and accompanies passage of tissue.

Moderate pain lasts a few hours and represents cramping of the uterus.

According to information from the Population Council, medical abortion also has an advantage over surgical abortion because "it does not carry the risk of uterine perforation and injury to the cervix."

However, if pro-life Dr. Joel Brind had his way, all women would be made aware that any abortion could cause them health problems later in life. A professor of biology and endocrinology at Baruch College in New York City, Brind spoke about the long-term effects of abortion at Strong Medical Center on Dec. 12 in a small auditorium not far from the abortion conference. His visit to the center was sponsored by Feminists for Life and the St. Luke's Medical Association (formerly the Catholic Physicians' Guild).

Brind cited numerous studies that linked abortion with breast cancer in his speech to about 25 people in the center's Whipple Auditorium. Unlike a spontaneous abortion (miscarriage), medical and surgical abortions unnaturally interrupt pregnancies, he noted, creating a number of unhealthy effects for mothers.

During a pregnancy, immature cells multiply in a woman's breasts, cells that are vulnerable to carcinogens, he said. In an uninterrupted pregnancy, such cells differentiate when a pregnancy comes to term, and produce milk, and the number of immature cells in a woman's breasts is actually smaller after pregnancy than before. However, this process does not take place following an induced abortion, he said, leaving immature cells in place that are vulnerable to cancer-causing agents.

"The long-term side effects of inducing abortion will remain the same," he said, criticizing doctors for promoting medical abortion. "It's certainly not good for women, and they certainly have a right to know about it."

Abortion rate declining, according to center

WASHINGTON (CNS) — An official of the National Right to Life Committee hailed recently announced abortion statistics as "very encouraging."

"Obviously the more the American people learn about the humanity of the unborn child and the violence of abortion, the more they reject abortion," said Laura Echevarria, spokeswoman for the NRLC.

She was commenting on statistics released Dec. 4 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta indicating a decline in the number of induced abortions performed in the United States during 1995.

According to a preliminary analysis of the data for 1995, the CDC said, there were a total of 1,210,883 legal induced abortions in 1995, a decrease of 4.5 percent from the number reported in 1994. The

number of live births decreased 1.5 percent in that same period. Final data for 1995 will be released in the spring of 1998, the CDC said.

After the U.S. Supreme Court lifted most state restrictions on abortion in its 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision, the number of legal induced abortions steadily increased to a high of 1.4 million in 1990. Since then, the number has been decreasing by about 30,000 to 60,000 each year.

Also decreasing — from 321 in 1994 to 311 in 1995 — was the number of legal abortions per 1,000 live births, called the national abortion ratio. The 311 figure was the lowest for any year since 1976.

The national abortion rate — defined as the number of legal abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44 years — declined from 21 in 1994 to 20 in 1995. Half the legal

abortions (54 percent) were performed during the first eight weeks of gestation, the report said, while approximately 88 percent of abortions were performed within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Lisa Koonin, author of the report and chief of surveillance for the CDC's Division of Reproductive Health, attributed the decrease to several causes. Among them were the more effective use of contraception, the higher proportion of older, less fertile women in the 15-44 group, a change in attitudes toward abortion and a decrease in access to abortion services.

The National Right to Life Committee's Echevarria, however, attributed the decrease in part to "the work of countless pro-life citizens working in their communities to educate their neighbors and encourage life."

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