The abortion lottery

Women take chances with 'tryout' doctors

By Pamela Zekman and Pamela Warrick

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When a woman goes to an abortion clinic, she entrusts her body to strangers—doctors she knows nothing about, doctors she has never met.

On Michigan Ave., women entrust their bodies to doctors who may be mere mechanics on the abortion assembly line.

They may be moonlighting residents, general practitioners with little or no training in women's medicine, or even unlicensed physicians. While skilled clinic brochures promise only board-certified obstetrician-gynecologists, few have earned even that accreditation.

These doctors rarely tell patients their names. To many, patients are not people. They are profits.

During the five months The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn. investigated the city's abortion business, we heard from many of these doctors' victims—women who were awakened nights after their abortions by chills and fever, uncontrollable bleeding and painfully debilitating cramps. Some had dead tissue left inside them. Others had massive infections, perforated bowels, or punctured uterus. Some ultimately underwent complete hysterectomies—the removal of all reproductive organs.

Former patients have filed lawsuits against doctors in all four of the Michigan Ave. abortion mills where dangerous medical practices were uncovered during the investigation. But many women still suffer quietly, afraid to even admit they've had abortions, let alone press public charges against the doctors who performed them.

At least two women who received Magnificent Mile abortions are dead.

Act for more inspections
Thompson gives order, Page 3

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mere residents from Cook County Hospital looking for extra income—are "tried out" on patients by clinic director Dr. Carlos Baldoceda.

Baldoceda, 33, who was educated in South America, was promoted to medical director of Biogenetics this summer. Though he is licensed to practice medicine, even he has not received board certification for his specialty, gynecology.

Those who audition well for Baldoceda practice their techniques by operating solo on unsuspecting patients.

But a 28-year-old nursing student who received an abortion from one of Biogenetics' tryouts this fall said it was clear to her that "the doctor had no idea what he was doing. I was just a guinea pig."

HER ABORTION was part of Cook County Hospital resident Jovenel Dubois' on-the-job training. "The director of the clinic was telling this guy, 'You're supposed to do this, you're supposed to do this. No, that's not the right instrument.'" she said.

"It must have been his first abortion," the patient concluded after Dubois' performance. At 30, the French-schooled Dubois is a third-year resident at the hospital.

"He was picking up the wrong things, dropping the instruments," said Dubois' nervous patient. "I wonder what would happen if he made a mistake. What would happen to the woman?"

Several weeks later, Dubois' "guinea pig" patient was still suffering cramps, passing blood clots and complaining of terrible pain.

"THAT'S TERRIBLE," said Dr. John Fultz, medical co-ordinator for the Illinois Department of Registration, when asked about the practice of residents auditing patients. "That's just like opening an office and deciding you're going to do surgery and then starting to do it. If you miss, you learn that's..."
Abortion as a game of chance

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not the way to do it. It's an outrageous way to operate.

Dr. David Aberman, 31, is a Guadalajara (Mexico) medical school graduate. While completing his fourth-year residency at Cook County Hospital, Aberman regularly performs abortion at Biogenetics.

He bragged to undercover investigator Michelle Young that the clinic pays him $15 for every abortion he performs on a cash customer and $20 for every public aid recipient. At those rates, a doctor moonlighting once a week can net as much as $30,000 a year, he said.

Last year the Illinois Department of Public Aid paid $126,809 for bills submitted in Aberman's name, mostly for abortions at Biogenetics. "This is a good way to make a lot of money easily," Aberman told Young. "But there's a lot of worry if you ever do get caught at it."

ONE OF ABERMAN'S patients told the Sun-Times how he apparently "goofed" on her.

"He didn't say a thing to me when he walked in to do the abortion, except, 'What do we have here? Ah, too much weight.'"

"He gave me no anesthesia, not even a local. I had tears running down my cheeks. And then, right in the middle of performing the abortion, he yelled to the nurse, 'This lady is not pregnant!'"

While abortions on non-pregnant women are not rare at some of the Michigan Av clinics we investigated, they should be.

Dr. Carlos Baldoceda, 33, educated in South America, is medical director of Biogenetics Ltd., 520 N. Michigan, although he has not received board certification for his specialty, gynecology. As medical director, Baldoceda assigns doctors who may have little or no related experience to perform abortions. One fourth-year resident at Cook County Hospital, a graduate of a medical school in Guadalajara, Mexico, bragged to an undercover investigator that the clinic pays him $15 for every abortion performed on a cash customer, $20 for a public aid patient, or as much as $30,000 a year.

Baldoceda, when not conducting abortion audits, takes the field himself—at least once in his locker clothes and once after drinking champagne at a clinic party. Another time, he was giving an internal examination while receiving a massage from a nurse. "Fancy seeing you here," Baldoceda, laughing, told the nurse.

Clinic falsely promises only 'board-certified obstetrician-gynecologists'

At Biogenetics Ltd., 520 N. Michigan, new patients are handed slick brochures boasting that only "board-certified" doctors are on its staff. In fact, the clinic—which Clifford Josefek (facing camera) publicly claims to own—has none, according to the records of two medical associations. Instead, unsuspecting patients are given abortions by "rookie" doctors and general practitioners with little experience at any clinic. Several lawsuits against these doctors from Biogenetics and three other Michigan Av clinics are pending.

He was picking up the wrong things, dropping the instruments," said the nervous patient.

"He was doing the wrong things, dropping the instruments," said the nurse.

When Aberman's boss, Baldoceda, is not busy auditing young residents on frightened patients, he occupies himself in other ways.

Investigator Young watched Baldoceda operate on a patient while he was getting a sensual massage from the nurse assisting him.

The patient was lying on her back, legs spread, undergoing an internal examination by Baldoceda, when Young and the nurse entered the room.

"Fancy seeing you here," Baldoceda said to the nurse.

Baldoceda had begun suctioning the patient's uterus when Young said, "The nurse walked around behind the doctor and began playing with his surgical cap. She moved the cap around, put her hands beneath it and curled clumps of his hair around her fingers.

"She was teasing him, flirting with him," said Young. "And in the middle of the operation, she began rubbing his shoulders. He was laughing. The patient was moaning."

YOUNG RECALLS seeing the stern-faced Baldoceda laugh only one other time. It was after a noon-hour champagne birthday party for one of the clinic nurses. All three clinic doctors had at least one glass of the bubbly that day, but Baldoceda had had more than a flaw.

According to Dr. Warren Pearse of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, "the dangers to patients are obvious" from doctors who have been drinking too to four glasses of champagne. "You have to be alert in surgery," Pearse said. "There is no such thing as minor surgery. In abortions, your touch must be sensitive." Baldoceda and Aberman went on to perform more abortions after the celebration.

As one patient stumbled out of a procedure room and fainted, Baldoceda began to laugh. "He stood a few feet away, leaning against a pillar, laughing and acting dizzy as the aides struggled to get the woman up," Young said.

But what patients remember most about the doctors at Biogenetics is not their sense of humor. It is the cold, mechanical manner of their method and the steady clip at which they move from patient to patient.

A woman who had an abortion one early August morning recalls lying on the operating table waiting for her doctor—30-year-old Dr. Pankaj Thaker—to get to her. "I could swear that there was only one doctor and he just went down the line giving abortions," said the woman.

"I started crying because I could hear that little [suction] machine going on and going off. He just kept getting closer and closer. I heard his voice pop off in the next room and then he came to me.

"He didn't say a word. He came in and did it and walked out in three minutes. Then he started down the hall again..."

ANOTHER BIOGENETICS patient said she turned page 5

License revoked, but clinic operates

One of the questions posed by the Abortion Profit series is how Water Tower Reproductive Center, 840 N. Michigan, has managed to stay open despite the revocation of the clinic's license on Sept. 25.

When the Department of Public Health revoked the license of the clinic owned by Dr. Arnold Bickham, it assumed the action would mean no more abortions would be performed. But the department did not send an inspector to check and the clinic is still operating.

The department also did not know Bickham had obtained a temporary restraining order on Oct. 23 against the health department's revocation.

On Nov. 3, District Court Judge John Powers Crowley extended the order until Nov. 24. And Monday, Bickham filed suit in Circuit Court to have his license restored.

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Patient recalls: ‘I was just a guinea pig’

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waited five hours to see a doctor. She got Baelduce. “He just took five minutes. He was very rude and did the abortion so fast, there was no time for the anesthetic to work,” the woman recalled. “That’s why I think he left that afterbirth inside me.”

More than a week later she was still bleeding heavily and suffering from severe cramps. Balduccia had to number her uterus to remove the tissue he left behind.

Undercover investigators at both Biogenetics and the Water Tower Reproductive Center, 840 N. Michigan, also saw doctors performing abortions with precious little attention to their own cleanliness, or to their patients’ health.

At Biogenetics, Young observed Balduccia stop short, half way out the clinic, to come back to do “just one more” abortion.

It was a busy day and the waiting room was still crowded with patients when Balduccia changed his mind about going home. He did not, however, change his clothes. “He just took off his coat and walked into a procedure room and started the abortion,” Young said. “He didn’t bother to take off his street clothes and put on his surgical scrubs.”

At WATERTower Reproductive, investigator Mindy Tressman watched clinic owner Dr. Arnold Bickham perform an abortion, saying he would not do an abortion on her because she was 16 weeks pregnant. (By law, clinics may only perform abortions on women up to 12 weeks pregnant.)

Tressman saw the patient minutes after she was ordered off the operating table. She was sitting in a waiting room chair, moaning and clutching her stomach.

A note to our readers

A five-month investigation by The Sun-Times and the Better Government Assn. has disclosed fraud and other abuses at some private clinics and clinics providing abortion services in Chicago.

Reliable abortion counseling should be obtainable from family physicians. Other organizations that are prepared to respond to women’s health questions are:

- Planned Parenthood, 55 E. Jackson, 322-9240.
- Health Evaluation Referral Service, 2757 N. Seminary, 246-0166.

Later, in an interview from her hospital bed, the patient, 19-year-old Anna Guinn of Hammond, Ind., gave this account of what happened:

Guinn said she was being examined by one of Bickham’s doctors, Prakash Rattan, when she heard the suction machine go on. “Without giving me an anesthetic, he started up the machine,” said Guinn. “I started screaming because it was so painful.”

“The doctor said, ‘Lessen your breath and shut your mouth!’ Then, all of a sudden,” said Guinn, “he stopped.”

“He took the [hysterectomy] probe out of me and said, ‘Stay in this position.’ Another doctor [Bickham] came in, stuck his hand up my and said, ‘Too far back!’”

“What the hell are you talking about?” yelled Guinn. “It’s already half done!”

“I am, we didn’t even touch you,” said Bickham. “All you had was a pelvic exam.”

Guinn said she asked Bickham to call an ambulance for her. “By this time, the cramps were unbearable. The whole examining table was covered with blood,” she said.

Rushing between abortions, Agustin occasionally doesn’t even have time to wait for the anesthesia to take effect, much less do his record keeping.

Agustin, 41, went to medical school in Manila. He is a general practitioner who at one time did abortions for $15 each at Biogenetics.

At MICHIGAN AVENUE Medical Center, an undercover investigator working as a nurse had to order out to Agustine that he had failed to note on a patient’s chart any details of the abortion he performed two hours before.

Agustine sat down and filled up the figures from memory—including the size of the uterus cavity and amount of tissue removed.

On two other occasions, investigator Julienne Felker saw Agustine write on patient charts that he had removed about 200 cc. of tissue and blood, when, in fact, he had removed three times that much.

But, according to Medicaid officials, Agustine’s problems with record keeping are not limited to his abortion practices.

Before suspending Agustine from the Medicaid program last year, state authorities found he had ordered as many as 21 different lab tests for patients whose charts included no diagnosis or evidence of any physical examination. Public Aid investigators charged Agustine altered the records after their initial review in an attempt to correct the deficiencies.

NEXT: The aftermath of Dr. Hub.