



Published Friday August 28, 2009

## Ex-employees aid abortion foes

By Leia Baez-Mendoza  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

### **WORLD-HERALD EXCLUSIVE**

As part of Operation Rescue's efforts to close down a Bellevue abortion clinic, the group is working with former clinic employees who say they performed medical procedures without proper licensing.

Operation Rescue previously filed a complaint with state officials accusing the Abortion and Contraception Clinic of Nebraska of unsafe conditions. To support that complaint, the group has gathered statements from the former clinic workers.

Dr. LeRoy Carhart, who operates one of the few clinics in the country that will perform some late-term abortions, said Thursday that his Bellevue clinic has never done anything that was not well within Nebraska's scope of medical practice.

"We have not done anything that was improper," Carhart said.

Today, Operation Rescue, which often uses confrontation and stirs controversy with large, vivid photos of fetuses, plans to begin training anti-abortion protesters in alternative methods aimed at getting Carhart's clinic closed down, said Cheryl Sullenger, senior policy adviser for Operation Rescue.

"We are hoping that we will be able to train a core group of people that will be able to conduct investigations, file complaints and use the legal system to close that clinic," Sullenger said.

The training session is closed to the public for security reasons, she said.

The World-Herald spoke with four former clinic workers, who agreed to be interviewed only if their names were not used because they feared being sued over confidentiality agreements they said they signed with Carhart.

Operation Rescue, though, said it would submit the women's sworn statements to authorities. Those affidavits will identify them by name.

None of the clinic workers left their jobs by choice.

Two of the women said they routinely started IVs at Carhart's clinic though they weren't registered nurses or certified licensed practical nurses, as required in Nebraska. One was fired from the clinic in June, while the other was laid off this month. There is no indication the women lost their jobs because of their alleged involvement in starting the IVs.

A third former employee, who was fired about six years ago, said she frequently administered medication intravenously although she wasn't a certified LPN. That's the minimum requirement for the procedure, according to Marla Augustine, a spokeswoman for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the regulatory agency for medical services.

The complaint was filed last month by Operation Rescue, based in Wichita, Kan., along with the Washington-based Christian Defense Coalition and two local anti-abortion groups, Rescue the Heartland and Nebraskans United for Life.

The complaint contends that Carhart's clinic is "in an appalling state of neglect and disrepair," and that Carhart is endangering lives with unsafe medical practices.

The complaint was forwarded by Attorney General Jon Bruning's office to the State Department of Health and Human Services. HHS officials will neither confirm nor deny whether an investigation is under way.

Two of the former clinic workers said they were trained by a registered nurse at the clinic and eventually were taught to insert IV needles and to give intravenous medication. One of the women, who had completed no education beyond a high school diploma, said she was starting IVs and administering medication within a few months of starting to work at the clinic.

Another of the former workers said she saw dried blood on an instrument laid out for a procedure.

A fourth former employee said she was concerned for the safety of the patients because she sometimes saw unsanitary conditions while she worked there. She was laid off from the clinic this month.

Three of the women have felony drug convictions. One was convicted after she was let go from the clinic. The two others had the convictions on their records before they were hired.

Sullenger, of Operation Rescue, said she hopes the women's stories will beef up her group's complaint.

"In general, it's women who are not educated, trained or licensed that are handling duties at the clinic, including starting IVs and assisting with surgeries," she said.

One of the former employees contacted Operation Rescue through its Web site. Another contacted Larry Donlan, president of Rescue the Heartland. Donlan or his attorney contacted the others.

One of the former clinic workers said Donlan promised to help her find a job after she was laid off from the clinic.

Donlan said he was eager to help the women and was pleased that most of them reached out to him to share their stories.

“It's part of our ministry to help these women,” Donlan said. “We can't get these women jobs, but we can give them leads. We are doing our best to help them.”

Carhart said several months ago that he temporarily would take on late-term abortions after his friend and colleague, Dr. George Tiller, a Wichita, Kan., abortion provider, was shot and killed at his church in May. Tiller ran the Women's Health Care Services clinic in Wichita, which is now closed.

Carhart specified that he would do third-trimester abortions at the Bellevue clinic only in cases in which the fetus, because of a medical problem, could not survive outside the mother's body.

Carhart has been a lightning rod on the abortion issue in Nebraska and nationally. In a lawsuit, he challenged the 1997 Nebraska law banning a particular type of abortion known medically as intact dilation and extraction, or D&X. In the procedure, a doctor removes the fetus as far as the skull, which is then crushed or cut to allow its removal through the cervix without injuring the woman. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the ban in 2000.

Carhart also challenged the federal Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal ban in 2007.

**World-Herald staff writer Katie Fretland contributed to this report.**

Contact the writer:

444-1336, leia.mendoza@owh.com