

A NEAR-FATAL ABORTION BOTCH

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Jian-Qing Zhu remembers the agony and the blood of a botched abortion that nearly killed her. She remembers that, in searing pain, she hemorrhaged on an examining table in the Chinese Woman's Clinic in Chinatown. She remembers that icy hands then dumped her in a hallway as she passed out with a ruptured fallopian tube and a collapsed lung. And she remembers that the newspaper ad that lured her to the clinic at 185 Canal St. had promised expert care by two doctors: Eugene Schwalben and Ting Deng.

Little did she know. Schwalben is a 78-year-old obstetrician who, court records show, has no hospital admitting privileges or malpractice insurance and who declared bankruptcy after lawsuits by patients. His colleague Deng, who Zhu says provided key elements of her care, is not a licensed physician at all, according to state records. Nor is "Dr." Ping Lu, who runs a nearby abortion clinic where Schwalben's medical credentials also hang on the wall and who told a Daily News researcher posing as a patient, "I do these operations all the time."

The Daily News discovered Schwalben and "Doctors" Deng and Lu in a six-month probe of medical charlatans and impostors who are preying on the city's Chinese immigrant community. The probe, aided by researchers wearing hidden tape recorders who posed as patients, found that numerous unlicensed, untrained individuals are performing surgery, giving injections, dispensing drugs, ordering X-rays and selling potions banned by the U.S. government. They are also performing abortions.

The investigation discovered four unlicensed abortionists in a small area of Chinatown alone: The two purported doctors working with Schwalben; a man who offered to scrape a patient's uterus for \$200; and a licensed acupuncturist who said he would induce an abortion by giving a patient herbal medicines. Dr. Cynthia Wu, a licensed obstetrician in Chinatown, says that in the past three years she has treated seven patients for sepsis, a potentially fatal blood poisoning that was caused by incomplete abortions done by unlicensed doctors.

One of those women was rushed, hemorrhaging, to Bellevue Hospital, where an ultra-sound revealed the fetus still intact. "I've called the state multiple times," says Wu. "But they say they need a witness, and I can't get anyone to testify. They're all too scared."

According to Patricia Eng, director of the Asian Women's Center, "Non-English-speaking women in the Chinese community don't know about Planned Parenthood and have no idea that

some clinics are butcher shops. "They go by whatever ad is in the newspaper. Then if there are problems, they don't know who to turn to. Usually they don't want it known that they've had an abortion. This puts them at great risk.

"Zhu's account to The News of her treatment at the Chinese Woman's Clinic is a nightmare entry into that world. Schwalben says that it never happened; he denies ever treating Zhu. Rather, he says, he merely called police after Zhu was found in grave condition in his building's lobby. Zhu has filed a criminal complaint against Schwalben and Deng. Asked about "Dr. Deng" during a brief interview at the clinic, Schwalben also says that he knows nothing of her. Told his name appeared with hers in Chinese-language newspaper ads, he responded, "Those bastards! I told them never to use my name in the ads."

As Schwalben spoke, Deng, who was hiding behind a nearby partition, ran to another room and locked the door.

In the clinic next door, at 191 Canal St., the woman who advertises as "Dr." Ping Lu also refused to comment. She ran out a backdoor and returned with Schwalben, who ordered a reporter and photographer off the premises.

Zhu, 34, and her husband, Larry Xia, share a successful import business in Queens, a home on Long Island and a healthy 6-year-old son. They very much wanted a second child, but postponed plans to conceive because Zhu was taking a high-dosage thyroid medication. When she found herself pregnant last October, they decided to have an abortion.

After scouring the advertisements in World Journal, the city's most widely read Chinese-language newspaper, they chose the Chinese Woman's Clinic because it promised a licensed and board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist. The ad called both Schwalben and Deng "doctors," although Deng is not. Zhu's husband accompanied her to the clinic on Oct. 31, where she paid \$380 for the operation. "They were a little tricky," she says. "The ad said abortions started at \$150."

When she asked about the price, Zhu says she was told general anesthesia cost more. "I said, okay. Then they found out about my thyroid problem and decided to do local anesthesia," she says. "But they didn't lower the price."

In an examining room, Zhu says, she met with Schwalben and was introduced to "Dr." Deng. Since Zhu speaks no English, Deng became her only channel of communication. Schwalben did an internal examination and took a urine sample, she says, while Deng performed a sonogram a procedure that should have revealed that Zhu's pregnancy was ectopic. That means the fetus had lodged in a fallopian tube instead of in her uterus.

"Then Dr. Deng gave me an injection in my arm," Zhu says. Deng is not licensed to do so. "I asked what was in it, and she told me, 'This will help you digest your food better.' I thought that was strange."

Zhu says Schwalben then gave her a second shot, of local anesthesia, in her uterus and performed a suction abortion on a womb that contained no fetus. "From beginning to end, I felt extreme pain," she says. Her husband, Xia, remembers hearing Zhu scream and sob as he sat in the waiting room.

"Mrs. Deng kept telling her, 'No problem, no problem,' " he says. "They gave us painkillers and antibiotics, but they were not in bottles or packages but plastic bags with no prescription or label to indicate what kind of medicine they contained."

Zhu was told to return in three weeks for a checkup. After a week, she says, she was still in pain and called the clinic. "I spoke with 'Dr' Deng," Zhu says. "She told me to take a painkiller, and for severe pain, to double the dosage. She never asked to see me, just said, 'Don't be nervous, you'll be fine.' "

After two weeks, Zhu says she was in such agony she could no longer stand, "and my belly was hard as a stone," a highly unusual post-operative condition. Again, she called the clinic, and spoke with Deng, who told her the problem was that she hadn't experienced vaginal bleeding.

"She told me, 'Maybe you'll have it later. After the blood comes out, the pain should go away,'" Zhu says. After a third week, when Zhu's face was so swollen her husband couldn't recognize it, she returned to the clinic for her checkup. Schwalben wasn't there.

"When I walked in, Dr. Deng looked surprised, and asked me, 'What's wrong? How can your face look like this?' " Zhu says, adding that, after performing a sonogram, Deng told her: "Your tummy looks very hard. But the sonogram and my exam show you have no problem."

Following Deng's instructions, Zhu says she rested for an hour, until Schwalben arrived. The two consulted in English. Then, Zhu recalls, Schwalben pressed hard on her abdomen, and blood gushed out her vagina. Medical experts say this is a dangerous procedure in an ectopic pregnancy. "I screamed, 'Stop it, stop it! I can't stand it!'" Zhu recalls.

Deng and the clinic secretary held her down. "Dr. Deng told me, 'You have to cooperate, so we can help you. You're going to be fine.' "

Schwalben asked how she felt. "Just to get him to stop, I told him, 'I'm okay now,' " Zhu says, adding that: "Five minutes later, I got such severe cramps that I doubled over. I could not stand or move. I asked Dr. Deng, 'Why do I have so much pain?' and she told me, 'It doesn't matter. Just take your time.' Then Dr. Deng ate lunch while I lay crying on the bed with pain."

As all this happened, Xia, who had double-parked the couple's van on Canal St., was frantically phoning the clinic. After twice being reassured all was well, he called a third time. "I yelled, 'Why is my wife still there?'" he recalls."

Mrs. Deng said, 'There's a serious problem here. Come upstairs to discuss what to do.'

I told her, 'You are the doctor. You must tell me what to do.' "

Mrs. Deng said, 'Come upstairs and take your wife to the hospital.' I asked her to put my wife on the phone. She was in too much pain to speak."

Before Xia could make it upstairs, Zhu says, Schwalben consulted with Deng, who then told her, "You have to leave right away."

Zhu begged for time to go to the bathroom, and they said, "No! You've got to leave!"

Icy with purpose, Deng and the clinic secretary grabbed her arms and force-marched her out of the clinic, Zhu says. She lost control, urinated and passed out in the hallway. Downstairs, four police cars pulled up to the building's side entrance, and Xia saw a cop carrying Zhu, still unconscious. Xia thought she was dead. "I shouted, 'That's my wife!' The officer made me sign a piece of paper so I could hold her in the car as we rushed to the hospital."

Fifth Precinct police records show an anonymous call to the station, not to 911, to report Zhu's need for assistance. A 911 call would have summoned a fully equipped ambulance rather than patrol cars with no medical staff. Calls to 911 are recorded and can be used as evidence in court.

At New York Downtown Hospital, Zhu was diagnosed with a ruptured tubal pregnancy and a collapsed lung. She was given a blood transfusion and underwent emergency surgery to remove a fallopian tube. The hospital's chief emergency room physician, Dr. Michael Haldeman, said Zhu's life was in grave danger when she was brought in.

"I have reported [Schwalben's conduct] to the state Office of Professional Discipline," he says.

According to Dr. Hakim Elahi, medical director of Planned Parenthood, "An ectopic pregnancy should definitely show up on a sonogram, if the machine is good and there's a qualified person reading it. There should be a clear view of both the uterus and the fallopian tubes." Standard procedure for abortions also calls for the physician to examine the tissue immediately after the abortion to insure the pregnancy was completely removed, Elahi says. "It would be immediately apparent if it was an ectopic, because there would be no pregnancy tissue at all," he says.

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