

Abortion doctor agrees to suspend

He has already lost his license in Pa. and N.Y. The 14 N.J. charges stem from 5 abortions he performed.

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TRENTON — A controversial abortion doctor has agreed to stop working in New Jersey until an administrative law judge decides whether the physician is fit to practice medicine.

The New Jersey State Board of Medical Examiners accepted Steven Chase Brigham's offer yesterday after deliberating about one hour.

Brigham said he would now get the chance to clear his name of charges of gross negligence and incompetence brought by the State of New Jersey.

"At least I get the opportunity to defend myself. That's the most im-

portant thing," he said after the board's decision. "It's been an ordeal. The charges are unfair and unfounded... (but) I see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Anti-abortion activists said they were satisfied for now.

"We are pleased Steven Brigham surrendered his license, and we are confident that the administrative law judge and the Board of Medical Examiners will ultimately act in the best interest of women in the state and permanently revoke his license," said Marie Tasy, spokeswoman for New Jersey Right to Life.

Brigham's medical license was revoked in New York three weeks ago. Before that, he agreed to stop practicing

medicine in Pennsylvania.

In October, an administrative law judge began hearings to determine if Brigham's license to practice in New Jersey should be revoked or suspended. That matter is continuing, but the state asked New Jersey's medical board yesterday to immediately revoke or suspend Brigham's license in light of the New York action.

Brigham offered to suspend his New Jersey practice temporarily, pending a decision by the administrative law judge, and the board decided to accept his offer.

The matter before the administrative law judge has been adjourned until Jan. 24.

Brigham is charged with 14 counts of negligence, gross negligence, malpractice and professional misconduct concerning five abortions performed in New Jersey and New York.

Most of the cases involved complications that arose during second-trimester abortions.

In revoking Brigham's privileges to practice, New York cited two of the five abortions brought before the court in New Jersey.

New Jersey should revoke or suspend Brigham's license because New York determined that he engaged in "gross and repeated actions of negligence regarding two patients," Deputy Attorney General Linda Ershaw-Levenberg argued yesterday.

One case involved a New Jersey woman, identified only as M.B., who sought an abortion at Brigham's Spring Valley, N.Y., office in November 1993. She was 26 weeks' pregnant.

New Jersey alleges that M.B. suffered cervical lacerations while Brigham was performing the procedure and that he did not make sure

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practice in New Jersey

the cuts were properly sewn up.

The patient began hemorrhaging, but — as New Jersey alleges and New York found in revoking his license — it was hours before Brigham called an ambulance to rush her to a hospital, where she had to have a hysterectomy.

In a second case, Brigham was found by New York to have unknowingly perforated the uterus of a woman, identified as A.W., who was 24½ weeks' pregnant.

Ershaw-Levenberg urged the board to accept New York's decision and take disciplinary action against Brigham.

Brigham pleaded with the board for the opportunity to defend himself against the charges. He said if the board revoked his license on the basis of the two cases cited by New York, the remaining 12 charges

brought against him in New Jersey would forever hang over his head.

"Am I ever going to be allowed to defend myself?" Brigham asked. "My name has gone across the country. My grandmother in Atlanta who didn't even know I did abortions reads in the paper about the New Jersey allegations. ... This will haunt me the rest of my life. I just want to exonerate myself to my family and the world."

With yesterday's action, Brigham can now practice only in California and Florida.

In Florida, Brigham took over for John Britton at the Ladies Center in Pensacola, after Britton was shot and killed outside the clinic.

Paul Hill, a former minister, has been convicted and sentenced to die for killing Britton and his unarmed escort.