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New York revokes license of abortion doctor

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By DAVID VANHORN

New York has revoked the medical license of controversial abortion doctor Steven Brigham, who now faces another challenge to his practice in New Jersey.

Two boards acting under the auspices of the New York Department of Health concluded Brigham is a danger to the public for acting negligently and displaying bad judgment in two abortion cases. Both women were hospitalized with injuries, and one had to undergo an emergency hysterectomy.

"(Brigham) is under-trained, has demonstrated grievous deviations from accepted standards of care and diligence, has shown submarginal abilities

MD to face Jersey medical board after negligence cited in 2 cases

and has evidenced not the slightest recognition of any of his deficiencies," a hearing committee in New York said. Brigham yesterday replied that he had "no chance of a fair hearing. It's 'rigilantism.'"

In light of New York's decision, he has been ordered to appear before the state Board of Medical Examiners next Wednesday in Trenton to show why he should be allowed to keep his license in New Jersey, said Bonnie James Sheppard, spokeswoman for the state Division of Consumer Affairs.

Brigham works at offices in Phillipsburg and Voorhees, Camden

One case that drew the attention of New York and New Jersey officials was an abortion performed in November 1993 on a 20-year-old Middlesex County woman who was 28 weeks pregnant. The woman bled from lacerations to her uterus, cervix and uterine artery before an emergency hysterectomy was done at a hospital, according to the charges.

New York suspended Brigham's license in January, and a hearing committee in August concluded he used "inexcusably bad judgment" and that his negligence was "life threatening."

Brigham also "routinely displayed a tendency to inflate and embellish the truth" on his medical qualifications, the committee said.

Asked why Brigham did not promptly transfer one patient to a hospital to treat her profuse bleeding, he replied in part that there is nothing "magical" about a hospital, the committee said. His answer showed his inability "to distinguish between mere attention and appropriate care," the panel's decision said.

The New York Administrative Review Board for Professional Medical Conduct issued a ruling on Nov. 23 affirming the hearing committee's recommendation of revocation.

In his defense, Brigham said both New York cases involved "technically difficult" late-term abortions with "known and accepted complications."

Brigham said he is properly trained and charged that the hearing committee failed to consider the testimony of three physicians who defended his performance. "I'm obviously disap-

disappointed. I think it's unfair and unjust. I think I was a victim of bias and prejudice.

— Steven Brigham

pointed. I think it's unfair and unjust. I think I was a victim of bias and prejudice," said Brigham, who plans to file a court appeal.

New Jersey Right to Life spokeswoman Marie Tasy said she hopes New Jersey officials follow New York's lead by revoking Brigham's license. Group members have picketed an office in Phillipsburg where Brigham works and protested at the first session of Brigham's hearing before Administrative Law Judge Joseph Fidler in October.

The hearing has been adjourned until Jan. 28, Sheppard said.

Brigham worked this year at the Ladies Center in Pensacola, Fla., following the murders in July of Dr. John Britton, a doctor at the clinic, and James Barrett, a retired Air Force lieutenant who was a volunteer escort and bodyguard for the clinic. Anti-abortion activist Paul Hill yesterday was sentenced to die in Florida's electric chair after being found guilty in the shootings.

Brigham said he has not worked in Pensacola in several weeks and is required to notify Florida officials of his license revocation in New York.

Brigham surrendered his Pennsylvania medical license in 1992 while undergoing a state investigation. He let his license expire this year in Georgia instead of facing a disciplinary hearing, and the medical board of California is holding a hearing in March on whether to revoke or suspend his license.

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