

Press of Atlantic City, The (NJ)
September 14, 2007
Edition: Atlantic & Ocean
Section: Region
Page: C1

ABSECON OFFICIALS INVESTIGATE NEW ABORTION PROVIDER

Author: MICHAEL CLARK Staff Writer, (609) 272-7204
Dateline: ABSECON

Atlantic Women's Health is owned and run by Dr. Stuart Sackstein, who resigned as medical director of Alternatives in Atlantic City the day after state health inspectors closed the clinic indefinitely.

City officials are investigating a local doctor's office after learning it is providing abortions, but a pro-choice advocate calls the move a witch hunt.

The city is looking into the practice, Atlantic Women's Health, after receiving several calls from residents opposing the office's operation, according to City Council President Lynn Caterson. The calls were triggered by a report in The Press of Atlantic City about the office advertising abortion services shortly after the area's lone abortion clinic, Alternatives in Atlantic City, was closed by state officials for health violations in June.

Acting City Clerk Carie Crone contacted a Press reporter Wednesday asking for information about the office.

"We were receiving calls, and we're trying to do an investigation ourselves," Crone said. "We were unaware that this was going on."

The Press referred Absecon officials back to its report.

"Any kind of question concerning the legitimacy of an operation anywhere in this city is going to be looked into," said Caterson, a Republican and local attorney. "There is no question, I do not want anything illegal going on in the city of Absecon."

There have been no charges or accusations made against Atlantic Women's Health by any state, county or municipal authority.

"There's nothing to investigate," said one employee reached by phone at the White Horse Pike office Thursday. She did not give her name.

Atlantic Women's Health, however, has been linked to Alternatives. The Absecon office is owned and run by Dr. Stuart Sackstein, who resigned as Alternatives' medical director June 23, the day after health inspectors closed the clinic indefinitely when it discovered its filthy conditions, expired drugs, lack of hot water and poor sterilization practices. The clinic remains closed.

Sackstein, 61, has refused to comment on Alternatives or his Absecon office.

Courtney Wicks, executive director of NARAL Pro-choice New Jersey, said the investigation is an unwarranted attack on a "perfectly legal doctor's office."

"I do not condone any witch hunts on abortion clinics," Wicks said. "It sounds like they're targeting abortion clinics specifically."

Wicks said abortion facilities across the state have been stigmatized because of Alternatives' shortcomings.

"These clinics should be governed the same as you would govern any other (health facility)," Wicks said. "Alternatives, for whatever reason, did not follow state regulatory standards. Just because they got shut down doesn't mean every clinic in the state is doing the same thing."

Admitting that she knows little about the license requirements for abortion offices and clinics, Caterson questioned whether Atlantic Women's Health had the proper approval to provide abortions. According to the state's Division of Consumer Affairs, abortions can be performed in any doctor's office, with certain limitations depending on the stage of the pregnancy.

Caterson could not provide many details as to why the office was being investigated or what officials expected to find.

"What we find out about it is certainly going to dictate what we do about it. A good investigation doesn't know where it's headed," she said. "I do not skirt questions, that's not what I'm about. But it's very difficult for me to answer your questions. Anyone who has investigated anything has started at the beginning. That's where we are at now."