

# Pregnant or not, women given abortions



## THE ABORTION PROFITEERS

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and Pamela Warriick

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Nine out of 10 times, a simple urine test accurately diagnoses pregnancy. And, unless there is other proof of pregnancy, medical experts say, women with negative tests are not candidates for abortions.

But working undercover at the Water Tower Reproductive Center, 840 N. Michigan, BGA investigator Mindy Trossman counted 81 abortion procedures performed on women with negative pregnancy tests. That was 12 per cent of all the women who received abortions during the two months Trossman worked there.

"These numbers are very incriminating," said Dr. Louis Keith, professor of gynecology at Northwestern University Medical School and a practicing physician. "If that was my clinic and I had 81 women come in with negative pregnancy tests, then 81 women would have gone home."

AT BIOGENETICS LTD., 520 N. Michigan, we also found that women with negative urine tests were sold abortion procedures.

During a five-month investigation of Chicago's abortion business by The Sun-Times and the Better Government Assn., we witnessed some of these painfully needless abortions and saw the aftermath. Women innocently underwent abortions they didn't need and, as a result, suffered massive infections, bruises, wrenching cramps, severe bleeding.

Not only does Water Tower Reproductive owner Dr. Arnold Bickham pay scant attention to pregnancy tests before abortions, but he also seems uninterested in finding out if the women he sold abortions needed them.

As disclosed Sunday in this newspaper, Bickham's clinic does not send the tissue removed during abortions to a laboratory for analysis. Instead, it may be flushed down a toilet. Such analysis is needed to determine whether the patient who underwent the abortion was pregnant, and if she was, whether the abortion was complete.

"But you know," a clinic worker whispered to Trossman, "Dr. Bickham does abortions on women who aren't pregnant. Once they get back there [to the examining rooms]," confided another, "he'll do them. He doesn't ever want the patients to find out the results of their test. . . You'll find out soon that he does [abortions on] everybody."

So it seemed.

**TROSSMAN WATCHED** once as Bickham turned what was supposed to be a simple examination into a fast abortion on a woman with no apparent signs of pregnancy.

Trossman looked at the patient's chart and saw that a test of her urine showed she was not pregnant.

## Note to readers

Safe and compassionate abortion care is obtainable in the Chicago area. Reliable abortion counseling should be sought from family physicians. Other organizations that are prepared to respond to women's health questions are:

• Planned Parenthood Assn., 55 E. Jackson, 322-4240.

• Health Evaluation Referral Service, 2757 N. Seminary, 248-0166.

• The Women's Switchboard of the Midwest Women's Center, 800-972-5404.

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AT BIOGENETICS LTD., 520 N. Michigan, patients may be sold painful menstrual extractions by medical director Dr. Carlos Baldoceda (inset, above) instead of abortions when their pregnancy tests turn up negative. Pathological reports on five women from one day's operations at Biogenetics revealed none was pregnant. At Water Tower Reproductive Center, 840 N. Michigan, owned by Dr. Arnold Bickham (left), BGA undercover investigator Mindy Trossman found that 81—or 12 per cent—of the abortions during the two months she worked there were performed on women whose pregnancy tests were negative.

"Am I pregnant?" the patient asked. Bickham ignored her question. "Let me examine you," he said. After a brief examination, Bickham turned on the suction machine and started the abortion.

Only then did he answer. "Yes," said Bickham, "definitely pregnant. Definitely pregnant. . . But not any more."

Many doctors wouldn't think of beginning an abortion on a woman who didn't know whether she was pregnant. "The most important thing," one doctor said, "is the question of whether the procedure is necessary. The patient must know her test results."

We interviewed four other Water Tower Reproductive patients, like the woman Trossman accompanied through the surprise abortion, who were never told if they were pregnant before doctors began emptying their wombs.

"I wanted to be tested first to make sure," one patient said. "But they never told me the results of the test. I figured if I was let in to see the doctor, I must have been pregnant. If they would have told me it was too early to tell [which in her case, it was], I would not have gone through with it."

**ANOTHER PATIENT**, who had a negative test but never knew it, said: "If the pregnancy test had been negative, naturally I would not have had the abortion."

"How do we know if we are pregnant or not if the doctors don't tell us?" asked the fourth patient. "How do we know if they aren't just doing this for the money?"

Some of Bickham's workers try to save patients from needless abortions. But one counselor who sent away a patient with a negative pregnancy test suffered for her effort. "Word filtered back that a negative patient was told to go home," Trossman recalled. "And the staff gave the counselor the cold shoulder for the rest of the day."

A few days later, that counselor was asked by five of her patients whether they were pregnant. She found that three of them had negative tests.

"I don't know what to do," she told Tross-

## Readers' reactions to The Abortion Profiteers, and a Fischetti cartoon—Page 28, in Views.

man. "I already sent one home before. How can I send three home now?"

At both Water Tower Reproductive and Biogenetics, apparently non-pregnant women often are also sold a menstrual extraction. Except for the fact that it costs less, a menstrual extraction is essentially the same as an early-abortion but is not as thorough or as effective in ending pregnancy.

And because such extractions usually are done on women whose periods are only a week or two late, the embryo is so tiny that it may be missed by the suction device. But the risks and discomfort of suctioning menstrual blood from the womb are as great as with an abortion, the experts say.

**MOST WOMEN WHO** undergo extractions aren't pregnant in the first place. Unless patients are carefully screened, as many as 80 per cent of the women who undergo the extractions do so needlessly, said Dr. Antonio Scommegna, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Chicago.

"Usually," he said, "you are doing a procedure that is not necessary. Studies have shown that you may be charting 80 per cent of these women for a procedure that they don't need."

Many doctors consulted by The Sun-Times said they would not even consider performing a menstrual extraction on a woman with a negative pregnancy test. Yet, at the Water Tower and Biogenetics clinics, it's the women with negative tests who are most often sold the extractions.

At Biogenetics, medical director Dr. Carlos Baldoceda may simply substitute a menstrual extraction for an abortion when the patient's pregnancy test turns up negative.

"Since the test was negative, the doctor said there would be a menstrual extraction instead of an abortion," a Baldoceda patient recalled. Within a week, she had "these terrible pains. They were so bad I couldn't

## Tenth in a series

walk. I got scared and went to a hospital. The doctor there said I had a severe infection and sent me back to the clinic that had done this to me." The patient still doesn't know if she really was pregnant.

**ANOTHER PATIENT** with a negative pregnancy test said a nurse tried to save her from the procedure.

"The nurse in the room suggested that I get a blood test to make sure that I was pregnant and to wait another week. 'But,' the patient said, 'the doctor hushed her up. He said, 'No, let's get this over with now.' " A pathological report on matter removed from her womb indicated the patient had not been pregnant.

On one day, Biogenetics doctors performed at least five operations on women who apparently didn't need them. Pathological reports on the tissue removed from these women's wombs that day indicated none of them was pregnant.

At Biogenetics, investigator Michelle Young discovered women may not even be able to rely on their laboratory test results, let alone their doctors.

One morning, she heard the lab technician who runs pregnancy tests, complain of a hangover. "I was at a gas of a party last night," he told Young. "I was drinking wine and smoking dope and didn't have a chance to eat. I've never felt so bad in my life."

The mistakes he made in his stupor made at least two patients feel even worse.

**THERE WAS A GREAT** commotion outside the recovery room. Young went to investigate. "He [the lab technician] is screwing up all the pregnancy tests," a counselor said. "They are all turning out positive."

Young looked into the recovery room and was surprised to see Dr. David Aberman bending over a patient still groggy from her operation. Such attention was unusual for most patients, but this woman was a friend of Aberman's boss, Clifford Josefik.

"I'm sorry," the doctor said. "It could happen to anyone."

"How could you do something like this?" the patient murmured. "I thought I was fortunate having Cliff as a friend so I could get this taken care of. Now I find out I didn't need anything taken care of."

"Well," said Aberman, who is still completing his residency at Cook County Hospital, "your pregnancy test was positive, and I didn't know that you weren't pregnant."

**THE MEDICAL EXPERTS** we consulted said such "mistakes" should not happen to experienced doctors. "There is no excuse for abortions being performed on women who are not pregnant if pelvic exams and pregnancy tests are done," said Dr. David Zbaraz, who works in Michael Reese Hospital's pregnancy termination unit.

"Doctors should not be doing [unnecessary abortions]," Zbaraz said. "If the test is negative, a good doctor will tell the patient to come back in two weeks and see if she's really pregnant or not."

Josefik denied that the clinic does abortions on women who are not pregnant.

But Josefik's friend wasn't the only woman who had an abortion by "mistake" at Biogenetics that day.

**ANOTHER PATIENT**, a 30-year-old mother and psychology student, also got an apology after her abortion.

"I thought Biogenetics would be good," the woman said. "But they told me they had found a mistake. I had an abortion and I was not pregnant!"

"The abortion was very painful. I had tears running down my cheeks. All of this and he says that he is sorry."

"If I was younger, this would've left a terrible emotional scar. It could ruin a woman's future relationships. It could damage her for the rest of her life. But what can a woman do when she's on the [operating] table?"

**NEXT: Greed before counseling.**