



Del. abortion doctor under scrutiny defends methods

Two former nurses at Planned Parenthood of Delaware told a packed Senate hearing room on May 29, 2013, the Wilmington clinic performed “meat-market style assembly line” abortions and put patients at risk by neglecting proper standards of care. The (Wilmington, Del.) Journal News

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Doctor who claims to have performed 50,000 procedures across U.S. faces misconduct charges.



(Photo: Gary Emeigh, The Wilmington, Del., News Journal)

Story Highlights

- Two nurses have lodged complaints against Timothy Liveright for his practices and behavior while performing abortions
- Liveright played an abortion doctor in a 2010 movie called "Blue Valentine"
- Liveright says he has properly performed the surgical procedure to end pregnancies in about six states

WILMINGTON, Del. -- By his own account, Timothy Liveright has [performed about 50,000 abortions across the country](#) over nearly three-plus decades, most recently for Planned Parenthood of Delaware.

He even played an abortion doctor in a 2010 movie starring Hollywood heavyweights Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams.

Last week, though, Liveright, 68, found himself under scrutiny in Delaware as nurses criticized his practices and behavior during a packed state Senate hearing, and state officials formally accused him of incompetence and misconduct that put patients in danger.

The abortionist defended himself in three lengthy interviews with The News Journal, saying he has properly performed the surgical procedure to end pregnancies in about six states, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey and California. Abortion foes have described him as a "circuit rider," but he calls himself a "contract physician."

He now lives on a farm near Allentown, Pa., and for the past few years Liveright flew his single-engine plane to Delaware about once a week to work at clinics in Wilmington and Dover. He'd perform as many as 30 abortions a day, he said, making about \$60 per procedure and from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a month, depending on demand.

Liveright's work in Delaware came to an abrupt end in April after the state began a second round of investigations in less than a year into complaints that his practices were sloppy and his behavior strange.

Though he had contested similar allegations in 2012 and prevailed when the state found no wrongdoing, Liveright said he decided to voluntarily surrender his license and part ways with the Delaware organization, which he called "disorganized, in disarray."

"I decided that my work in Delaware was no longer needed, and I have decided to pull up stakes," Liveright said.

Noting that he had never been disciplined during his career, a claim supported by Delaware officials and states where he has been licensed, Liveright described himself as a dedicated physician doing unpopular and controversial work for the benefit of women.

"This is a very political realm of medicine," Liveright said. "But most people in favor of abortion, I think, would be pretty happy with what I've done."

Accusations

Liveright said that while Planned Parenthood across the nation is a noble organization, he contends the Delaware agency is plagued by management, staffing and operational problems.

The state Division of Public Health cited the agency in April for 14 violations and said inspectors found "unsafe and unsanitary conditions." For several weeks, no abortions were performed there. The review was triggered by abortions, including some done by Liveright, in which bleeding or other complications occurred and injured patients had to be rushed to the emergency room.

Liveright spoke to the newspaper just hours before state prosecutors filed a four-page civil complaint with Delaware's medical disciplinary board that portrayed him as a doctor who engaged in shoddy, dangerous medical practices and unspecified sexual misconduct at Planned Parenthood.

"My job as a physician, where people are under stress, you do your blessed best to read the situation and try to put people at ease, whether you're humming a song, telling a joke, talking about their country of origin. Occasionally somebody might find that offensive."

Timothy Liveright

Deputy Attorney General Katisha D. Fortune accused Liveright of "incompetence and negligence" and of being an "immediate danger to the public" for acts such as oversedating patients, suctioning them unnecessarily, improperly administering oxygen and failing to avoid complications that sent patients to the emergency room, including one procedure during which he caused a perforation.

Delaware Planned Parenthood officials would not discuss Liveright's work.

Authorities are seeking a permanent revocation of Liveright's medical license in Delaware. Even though he has turned in his license, regulators said the complaint will still be heard by the state medical disciplinary board.

Liveright currently is licensed to practice only in Pennsylvania, where he said he has worked at Planned Parenthood in West Chester and clinics in Philadelphia. He is not currently practicing medicine there, he said. He once worked for Planned Parenthood in Trenton, N.J., Liveright said, but he let his license expire in 2011. Agency officials in those states would not comment on Liveright.

The doctor said he would fight the allegations.

He said he was being made a "scapegoat" for problems at the Wilmington clinic, and had only made one "mistake," perforating one patient's uterus earlier this year. That event triggered the

state's second investigation in several months, leading him to decide to stop working in Delaware, the doctor said.

"Of all the complaints I stated to the board, that was the only mistake I made. In general, I slipped up. It sometimes happens among abortion providers," Liveright said, adding that the woman's injury was not serious.

Liveright said he isn't sure exactly what he did wrong, but acknowledged, "It shouldn't have happened."

Liveright said another patient began bleeding excessively during one abortion and had to be treated at the emergency room, but he did nothing improper in that case. "That wasn't a mistake," Liveright said.

Overall, he said, "you would find my record is good. My care for patients is good. It's one lousy incident, a tempest in a teapot."

Many 'headaches'

Liveright said he often worked for nonprofits and before becoming an abortionist had treated the homeless and patients with AIDS, explaining that he was an advocate of "social medicine."

When he came to Delaware in late 2002, he worked for Planned Parenthood. He said the experience was rewarding but he let his license lapse in 2005 while he worked for their clinics in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. "I love the organization," he said.

He returned to Delaware in 2009 after renewing his license, and usually flew every Friday to New Castle County Airport for a day of work at the Wilmington clinic.

It was during this period that he made a brief appearance in the movie, "Blue Valentine," playing an abortionist. In his one scene, Liveright begins giving the character played by Michelle Williams an abortion, but she decides she doesn't want to go through with it and leaves the treatment room.

During his second stint in Delaware, Liveright said, Planned Parenthood was beset by "a rather tumultuous administrative set of headaches."

The Wilmington clinic's practices also left much to be desired, he said. "I've been around, and this place was definitely less well-organized than other places I've been," he said. "A lot of it was management was not at the top of their game."

Liveright also questioned the judgment of state regulators who investigated allegations by former clinic nurses Joyce Vasikonis and Jayne Mitchell-Werbrich about him and the clinic. They cleared him late last year of any wrongdoing but now consider him a danger, an action he labeled "double jeopardy."

Patients wait

The Attorney General's Office and the nurses painted a markedly different picture of Liveright.

Fortune, whose complaint summarized the findings of a Division of Professional Regulation investigation, wrote that his negligence occurred this year in February and March during five surgeries and was "dishonorable and unethical and likely to harm the public."

While Vasikonis told The News Journal last week that Liveright's abortion technique was first-rate, she and Mitchell-Werbrich described his behavior as troublesome.

Mitchell-Werbrich said Liveright left the clinic last June to tend to an emergency mechanical situation with his plane while patients -- already medicated and awaiting procedures -- sat in the waiting room. Two patients later were brought to the recovery room after "roaming outside confused and dazed," she said. Two others in recovery endured cramps during Liveright's absence.

When Liveright returned, she said, he went through the halls proclaiming, "Where are the patients? Let's get the ball rolling."

His actions, she said, caused staffing problems.

Liveright said no patient was put in jeopardy that day.

Mitchell-Werbrich also said that while operating, Liveright would chant hymns, including one with the lyrics: "Jesus, oh Jesus, take the sinners down by the river, oh Jesus." She said one patient had tears streaming from her eyes as Liveright sang.

Liveright said he tries to put patients at ease.

"My job as a physician, where people are under stress, you do your blessed best to read the situation and try to put people at ease, whether you're humming a song, telling a joke, talking about their country of origin," he said. "I think I'm pretty good at that. Occasionally somebody might find that offensive."

Liveright said the two nurses had legitimate concerns -- not about him, but about Planned Parenthood.

"Planned Parenthood is partly to blame for all of this," he said. "They've allowed this circus to continue. It's partly because they never listened to these women to begin with."

Liveright promised to clear his name but said he bears no ill will toward the agency.

"Women are taken care of. Abortions are done," he said. "A couple of complications, but by and large no problem. People can complain about nit-picky stuff and the nurses were on a rampage because no one would listen within the organization."

Despite the unwelcome allegations and the fact that he thinks Planned Parenthood has "blackballed me," Liveright said he would consider working for them again.

"Oh sure," he said. "I don't take this personally."