

# I am an abortion provider

And here is why I believe women and families should be able to make their own reproductive choices

<http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2016/02/28/I-am-an-abortion-provider-for-Planned-Parenthood-and-the-Allegheny-Reproductive-Health-Center/stories/201602280017>

By Sheila Ramgopal

I am an obstetrician and gynecologist in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is a city I have called home for almost 12 years. I live here with my husband, two dogs, two cats and two geckos. My job includes delivering babies, doing pap smears, performing hysterectomies, talking about sex and providing contraception, among many other things. I provide care to patients at all stages of life, and it is an honor to be able to do this work.

I am also an abortion provider. I perform abortions because I want to provide choices and freedom to patients, their partners and their families. I do this work because it is important.

Abortion has been practiced for centuries in many forms — such as ingesting abortifacients, inserting sharp instruments into the uterus and applying pressure to the abdomen — a reflection that women have sought reproductive choice from the beginning. Since the legalization of abortion in America, these procedures are safe; in fact, 10 to 100 times safer than childbirth.

Three in 10 women will have an abortion at some time in their lives. This means that most likely someone you know, love or are related to has had an abortion.

People who access abortion services are diverse, representing the spectrum of socioeconomic, ethnic, religious and racial groups. Those who walk through our clinic doors have various perspectives on abortion as well. Some people say “I am pro-choice, but pro-life for myself.” Others are staunchly one or the other. There is a spectrum on the choice scale. I have had many patients who are proudly pro-life and come for abortions. I also have had patients who have always been pro-choice but decide prior to having an abortion to continue their pregnancies.

This is why we provide choices. We provide education, support and love to those who seek care. We provide a judgment-free space where people can make the best decision for themselves.

Today’s political climate threatens this right. There are large groups who declare that the rights of embryo and fetus outweigh the rights of women and families. They seek to severely limit access to abortion and contraception. They use various techniques to achieve this, which have had a toxic effect on our reproductive and societal health.

Over the past several years, many freestanding abortion clinics in Western Pennsylvania have had to close due to legislation known as Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers, a.k.a. TRAP laws. Today, only two freestanding clinics are left in Pittsburgh — Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania and Allegheny Reproductive Health Center. These clinics serve a large region, including Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. Patients drive hours and hours to seek abortion care.

There is also the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funds from being used for abortion care. This means that those with publicly funded health insurance must pay out of pocket to access abortions. This disparately affects low-income patients and creates an even greater burden on them and their families. The consequence is that the entire community is affected.

As an obstetrician and gynecologist, I see patients at their most vulnerable and at their strongest. Fertility and child-bearing are beautiful and powerful aspects of humanity.

I stand proud as an abortion provider with many other talented and wonderful physicians, and I will always support the right of women to make their own decisions about their bodies.

*Sheila Ramgopal practices medicine at several locations in the Pittsburgh area, including the Planned Parenthood and Allegheny Reproductive Health Center clinics.*