

Simopoulos Sells Abortion Clinic Here

By Mary Battiata September 24, 1984

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Dr. Chris Simopoulos, the Northern Virginia physician scheduled to appear in court in Norfolk today in connection with what police have alleged was a scheme to perform abortion procedures on women who were not pregnant, has sold a medical clinic he ran in Falls Church.

Simopoulos' clinic, known as the American Women's Clinic, accounted for nearly one-fourth of the abortions reported in Northern Virginia last year, according to the Virginia Center for Health Statistics. The clinic, housed in a two-story white structure on W. Broad Street, reported 1,977 abortions in 1983, the center said.

The clinic is listed more than a half-dozen times under various names in the Northern Virginia Yellow Pages, advertising "low cost abortions," which a receptionist said cost as little as \$170.

It had a "very high volume," said Dr. Thomas H. Gresinger, a Fairfax physician who with others recently purchased the Falls Church clinic from Simopoulos. "The phone is still ringing off the hook there," Gresinger said.

Simopoulos, 47, who until recently operated a Woodbridge medical practice as well as a clinic in Norfolk and the one Falls Church, has been charged with two felonies linked to his Norfolk clinic.

He first was arrested July 25 as he allegedly prepared to perform an abortion procedure on an undercover policewoman who police said had falsely been told by Simopoulos that she was pregnant. On Sept. 5, he and another clinic physician were charged with performing an illegal abortion there.

Simopoulos, who was convicted four years ago in Fairfax Circuit Court of performing an illegal abortion on a 17-year-old Woodbridge girl at the Falls Church clinic, has contended through his lawyer that he is innocent of all charges. He sold his Norfolk clinic several weeks ago after his first arrest this summer.

Gresinger, who operates another medical clinic in Fairfax that offers abortions, said Simopoulos "called me about two weeks ago; he just figured I might be interested. We've bought it. It is now Commonwealth Women's Clinic."

Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Robert F. Horan Jr. disclosed in an interview that his office began investigating the Falls Church clinic after Simopoulos was arrested in July. Horan said that the sale would effectively end his investigation.

The Norfolk arrest followed an investigation during which more than a dozen women allegedly had been given false pregnancy tests at the clinic, authorities said.

Simopoulos was charged with a felony count of obtaining money under false pretenses and was released on bond. He is to appear in Norfolk General District Court today for a preliminary hearing.

The Virginia State Board of Medicine subsequently suspended his medical license pending the outcome of his trial, saying that he posed "an imminent danger to the public safety and welfare."

Simopoulos and Dr. Parviz Modaber, a Culpeper physician, face one criminal charge each for allegedly performing a second-trimester abortion at an unlicensed facility, a felony.

The state requires that abortions performed after the first trimester of pregnancy -- 12 weeks -- must be performed in a licensed hospital or clinic. Neither the Falls Church clinic nor the Norfolk clinic had such licenses, according to state health authorities.

Simopoulos received a two-year prison sentence for his 1980 conviction. All but 30 days of that sentence were suspended and his medical license was revoked. It later was restored along with privileges at several Northern Virginia hospitals. He fought the conviction all the way to the Supreme Court, which upheld his conviction last year.

Simopoulos, a Greek immigrant and father of four, received his license to practice in Virginia in 1969, three years after graduating from medical school at the University of Athens. At the time of his 1980 conviction, Fairfax Circuit Judge F. Bruce Bach complimented Simopoulos on the achievement of having come from "illiterate parents in the mountains of Macedonia" to medical school and a practice in the United States. "For my understanding . . . it's probably equivalent to a sharecropper's kid from South Carolina in the '30s getting through Harvard. It's something to be proud of."

Simopoulos' Norfolk attorney, George Christie, said his client will plead not guilty to all charges. Modaber, who has a practice in Culpeper and practiced at the Falls Church and Norfolk clinics, did not return a reporter's telephone calls. Modaber was successfully sued for malpractice in 1982 and subsequently was barred from using Culpeper Memorial Hospital after hospital officials said he needed more training.

Simopoulos remains licensed to practice medicine in the District of Columbia and Maine, a point that has prompted criticism from the Norfolk chapter of the National Organization for Women.

"I just can't believe it," said Janice Kohl, a member of the Norfolk chapter of NOW, which initiated the investigation the of the Norfolk clinic. "This indicates to me that something has to be done at the federal level to coordinate information about suspended licenses . The system isn't working."

Simopoulos applied to Maryland for a medical license this year, but authorities there rejected the application because of his 1980 conviction.

Joseph Sarnella, staff director of the District's Commission on Licensure, said Thursday that his office was looking into Simopoulos' case.

The Virginia State Board of Medicine recently decided not to take any action on Modaber's license until after a hearing before the full board.

Simopoulos has been named in a \$1 million malpractice suit filed in March in Fairfax Circuit Court by a Reston woman charging Simopoulos with negligence during two gynecological procedures in 1982 that allegedly left her infertile. The woman has filed a separate \$250,000 damage suit against Simopoulos, charging him with assault and battery for allegedly performing surgery on her against her will.

Simopoulos attorney Christie declined to comment on the lawsuits

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