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# Owner of Beach abortion clinic had license suspended in N.J.

Amy Jeter

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This building on 224 Groveland Road in Virginia Beach, shown on March 9, 2011, houses a



## VIRGINIA BEACH

An abortion provider who recently was disciplined in New Jersey for transporting late-term abortion patients between states owns a women's health clinic not far from the Little Neck section of the city.

Dr. Steven C. Brigham had his medical license suspended last fall by the New Jersey Board of Medical Examiners after authorities discovered he had begun at least five late-term abortions in New Jersey and then transported the patients to his clinic in Maryland, where state law allows second-trimester abortions outside a hospital, according to news reports.

Brigham is listed as the president and secretary of two companies on the second floor of 224 Groveland Road, according to the Virginia Beach Commissioner of the Revenue's office. That also is the address of a clinic called Virginia Women's Wellness.

Brigham is not licensed to practice medicine in Virginia. He has no day-to-day involvement with the local facility, said Dr. David R. Peters, who serves as the medical director for the Virginia League for Planned Parenthood and worked for 13 years at Virginia Women's Wellness. He said the clinic is safe and well-run.

"If my sister had need of an abortion, if I could not do it, I would not hesitate to send her to Virginia Women's Wellness," Peters said.

Like many abortion clinics, Virginia Women's Wellness isn't licensed as an outpatient surgical hospital and is considered a physician's office, according to the state health department. That means the clinic is not allowed to perform second-trimester abortions.

The center offers nonsurgical abortions for women up to nine weeks pregnant and early surgical abortions for women between four and 14 weeks pregnant, according to its website. It also offers other gynecological services, such as pelvic exams and emergency contraception.

Peters was one of two physicians working for the center from 1997 until last November. He said he left then to avoid negative perceptions about the clinic's association with Brigham after the license suspension in New Jersey.

Peters estimated that the center sees as many as 150 patients a month, with about 60 percent to 70 percent of the visits for abortions.

If an ultrasound indicated that a patient was in her second trimester, she would be referred to clinics in North Carolina or Maryland, he said. Abortions can be performed outside hospitals in North Carolina for women pregnant less than 20 weeks, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research and public policy organization with an abortion-rights perspective. Maryland allows them outside hospitals until the fetus is considered "viable," or able to survive outside the womb. After that, the state prohibits abortions unless the mother is endangered or the fetus is abnormal.

Asked if there were cases where late-term abortion patients were transported to another state from the Virginia Beach clinic, Peters said, "No. Absolutely not."

Virginia Women's Wellness is included on the website for Brigham's company, American Women's Services, along with 12 other clinics in Fairfax, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

A page on the site titled "Second Trimester Abortion" tells potential patients that not all of the company's facilities "are equipped to perform surgical procedures in the second trimester. "

"If the office most convenient to you cannot complete the procedure, you will be referred to one of our other locations after your first appointment. You will be expected to travel to that office for the subsequent appointments, but may return to the nearer office for your check-up. We can assist you in making travel arrangements to distant offices, if necessary."

Phone messages left Wednesday weren't returned by Virginia Women's Wellness or the registered agent of the two companies associated with the center or Brigham's Voorhees, N.J., clinic. Brigham's New Jersey attorney said he didn't know anything about the Virginia Beach center and didn't reply to questions sent by e-mail at his request.

Brigham unsuccessfully tried to open an abortion clinic in Virginia Beach's College Park area in the mid-1990s, according to a 1996 report in The Virginian-Pilot. At the time, a representative of the building's managing company said the lease application was denied because Brigham hadn't disclosed that the clinic would offer abortions and such facilities generally draw "too much" attention, according to the report.

At that time, Brigham's medical licenses in New York, Georgia and Pennsylvania had either lapsed, been voluntarily deactivated or revoked, and he was being investigated in California, according to the report.



In October, Brigham's New Jersey license was suspended after a patient in that state required emergency surgery after an attempted abortion at his Elkton, Md., clinic. Since then, the Maryland Board of Physicians has revoked the license of one of the doctors involved and suspended the license of another. Brigham doesn't hold a medical license in Maryland.

Additionally, authorities in Maryland have ordered Brigham to stop practicing medicine without a license there, and a health official in Pennsylvania has banned him from opening additional abortion clinics there, according to news reports.

In Virginia Beach, a company called Caring Corp., doing business as Virginia Women's Wellness, was registered with the Commissioner of the Revenue's office between 1997 and 2008, most recently at the Groveland address.

Another company, Professional Medical Services, is currently registered to that address and has been in business since 1997, the office said.

Four civil lawsuits have been filed against Virginia Women's Wellness or its related companies in Virginia Beach Circuit Court, all in 2001 or 2002. Each was concluded by either a settlement, voluntary dismissal or both, according to information from the Supreme Court of Virginia's website.

The Virginia Department of Health doesn't handle complaints about physician's offices.

Another physician, Dr. Craig S. Cropp, is listed as working at Brigham's clinics in Virginia Beach and Fairfax, according to his Virginia Board of Medicine profile.

His Virginia medical license has been in good standing since 2009.

However, in the preceding decade, he lost clinical privileges in three hospitals in southwestern Virginia and didn't practice clinical medicine between 2002 and 2006 because of restrictions on his license from the Virginia Board of Medicine, according to board documents.

His medical license was suspended once in Maryland and twice in Virginia.

In the recent instance, the Virginia board found that Cropp had returned to a practice of gynecology in December 2007 and performed surgical procedures without the supervision from an approved physician mentor, as required for Cropp by the board.

Brigham had served as Cropp's mentor; however, he wasn't licensed in Virginia and wasn't board-certified in obstetrics-gynecology, according to board documents.

A little more than a month after suspending Cropp's license in 2008, the board reinstated it and placed him on probation for at least a year.

Cropp didn't return a phone call Wednesday.

Peters said Wednesday that he was unaware of Cropp's history. The doctors had alternated days at Virginia Women's Wellness, so they didn't work side by side.

"Everyone spoke highly of him," Peters said. "I never saw any complications."

*Pilot writer Kristin Davis contributed to this report.*

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