

WOMEN'S HEALTH

MENU

IN THE NEWS

In op-ed, abortion provider discusses 'political act' of providing care in Texas

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In an opinion piece for *Time*, abortion provider Timothy Spurrell shares why he flies "more than 1,700 miles, each way, every other week, to provide abortion services in **Texas**, one of the most hostile political environments for abortion care that [he has] ever seen." Spurrell provides care at Whole Woman's Health.

Spurrell notes that while he initially planned for a career providing mental health care, his decision to provide abortion care "was a natural extension" of his desire to "help patients: to be there for people who were going through difficult times, to empower them in their own lives and to help them understand their options as they navigat[e] challenges."

According to Spurrell, "What distinguishes my work from that of other medical professionals is the way that abortion specifically, and women's health more generally, have become politicized." Medical professionals "shouldn't have to be 'political' to provide health care," he writes, but "[i]n the face of stigma and an onslaught of laws designed to punish our patients and shut us down, providing abortion care has become a political act."

Spurrell writes that he began providing abortion care in Texas after the state passed an omnibus antiabortion-rights law (**HB 2**), resulting in the closure of multiple state clinics. "As a result, the waiting room in the clinic was packed and chaotic," Spurrell writes, noting that he treated women who had driven several hundred miles to access care or "sold nearly everything they had to put together the money to pay for the procedure." Among his patients, Spurrell notes, he "saw exhaustion from the struggles they'd gone through to get to us, ... determination to get the care they knew they needed, and ... hope -- hope for all of the possible futures that ending a pregnancy might allow for them."

Spurrell highlights an HB 2 provision that mandates providers have hospital admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. "[T]his regulation is designed to end abortion in the state," he writes, explaining, "Getting admitting privileges at a local hospital is an arduous process, and unfortunately, because of abortion stigma and extreme anti-choice rules at religious hospitals, most refuse to grant them."

Spurrell notes that while he eventually obtained privileges, he was unable to admit the required number of patients to the hospital because "abortion in the vast majority of cases is a simple and safe procedure." As a result, "because the vast majority of my patients never needed follow-up care, I lost my privileges," Spurrell writes. According to Spurrell, "This regulation is designed to force doctors like me to hop from one hospital to another, begging for privileges that we won't be able to keep, precisely because we're providing quality service and because abortion is so safe."

Spurrell writes, "In 2000, when I became an abortion provider, I just wanted to provide quality care. Over the last 16 years, it's gotten harder." He notes that clinics have closed, providers have been threatened and harassed and some have stopped providing abortion care because of safety concerns for themselves or their families. He adds, "I can no longer remain silent as my patients, many of whom are afraid themselves to speak out or feel shamed for their decision, are targeted by political attacks."

Spurrell states, "I'm speaking out now because this has to stop. The clinic shutdown laws, the absurd hoops doctors and patients are forced to jump through, the rhetoric of blame and shame -- it has to stop." He writes, "A woman who has decided to end her pregnancy deserves compassion, respect and dignity," concluding, "I may not have planned to become an abortion provider, but I am now, and I will continue to be as long as patients need these services. It's what I do" (Spurrell, *Time*, 6/21).

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