

COHEN: End the lies — The Supreme Court can't let fake clinics keep deceiving women

By **REBECCA COHEN, MD, Guest Columnist** - March 21, 2018

On March 20, the Supreme Court will be hearing oral arguments in an important case, National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA) v Becerra. The case centers on the value that patients should receive full, accurate, comprehensive information about their healthcare. As a doctor, that's something I care deeply about – and you should care, too.

As an Ob-Gyn, my first obligation is to my patient. When a woman comes to my office, she has implicit trust in my training and my professional judgment. She expects that I will be honest and compassionate, providing her with appropriate diagnostic testing and accurate unbiased information. She expects that we will discuss the full range of safe options for her pregnancy and that I will care for her in a way that meets her reproductive needs. It's not about my beliefs, it's about what is best for my patient. It's about staying true to science, medicine, and the doctor-patient relationship, not personal ideology or opinion.

It is my privilege and professional obligation to treat women how any patient deserves to be treated: with compassion, care, and with honesty. This is the standard of care for any licensed medical professional, and it is why the NIFLA v. Becerra Supreme Court case is so important.

In 2015 California passed a law, the Reproductive FACT Act, which ensures women are provided with full, accurate information about their healthcare and programs related to pregnancy and family planning. It makes sure anyone who claims they provide medical advice or medical care is held to a high standard of honesty and professionalism. It simply requires facilities to disclose whether there is a licensed medical professional providing or supervising the facility or, in some cases, to post a small notice about the availability of comprehensive state family planning and prenatal care programs.

Unfortunately, right now there are more than 75 centers in Colorado — many affiliated directly with NIFLA, the plaintiff in the case — that claim to be women's health clinics. The truth is that they are women's harm clinics. They use deceptive tactics to lure vulnerable, often low-income, women into their centers under false pretenses. The technology website Gizmodo documented how Google Map searches for "abortion providers" or "where can I get an abortion" in certain areas of the U.S. turn up results for these fake women's health centers. These centers don't provide all-options counseling and compassionate care, but rather serve up shame, and lies around a pregnant women's health, choices and options. These centers may even locate themselves right next door to real women's health centers, and use similar names to real women's health centers, in order to trick people into going to the wrong place.

Once a woman is seen at one of these fake women's health centers, an unlicensed person could give her a medically unnecessary (and possibly inaccurate) ultrasound, along with false, incomplete information about her health and pregnancy. You don't have to be a doctor to know that decisions about pregnancy are time sensitive, and women deserve the full information about their healthcare, not lies.

These centers do not provide healthcare when they deceive a woman and tell her that she is "too far along" to access abortion, when they tell her that she has miscarried in order to dissuade her from seeking further care, or when they tell her that abortion poses health risks such as infertility, breast cancer, and birth defects in future pregnancies. As the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has repeatedly stated, there is no evidence whatsoever to support these medically inaccurate and deliberately misleading claims. These lies do not prevent women from accessing abortion, but they can cause delays that increase stress, cost, and risk.

As an Ob-Gyn and an abortion provider, my response to this is straightforward: pregnant women at a vulnerable time in their lives seeking health care deserve complete information and honesty. As a provider, I will continue to

offer that care. Now, we must join the call to end the lies, support patients, and provide one another with compassion and care, not deceit.

Rebecca Cohen, MD, is a practicing obstetrician/gynecologist and family planning specialist in the Aurora/Denver area. She is a Fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health.
