

Dr. Ming Kow Hah: physician of pain

By Pamela Zekman
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The patient was squirming on the operating table and screaming. In her pain, she clenched the hand of the nurse's aide. Her fingernails dug into the aide's wrist.

"You know you wouldn't have all these problems if you had your tubes tied," the doctor said evenly. "Anything, anything," his patient cried.

Dr. Ming Kow Hah, who has already lost his medical license in one state and faces revocation in Illinois, may give the fastest abortions in Chicago. According to a five-month investigation by The Sun-Times and the Better Government Assn., Hah also may give the most painful abortions in the city.

While many women feel discomfort during abortions, the procedure does not have to be excruciating. Thanks to the use of local anesthetics, it rarely is.



**THE ABORTION
PROFITEERS**

Fourth in a series

But the Hah abortion observed by BGA investigator Julianne Feikner at the Michigan Avenue Medical Center was agonizing because Hah performed the procedure without anesthetics.

He wasted no time, however, in signing up his screaming patient for a tubal ligation, a procedure in which the Fallopian tubes are closed off, preventing future

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'All Hah's patients are in pain because he doesn't take the time to give them (pain-kill- ing) injections.'



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DR. MING KOW HAH may perform the fastest—and most painful—abortions in Chicago, according to former patients and undercover investigators. Hah, whose license was revoked in Michigan and who faces revocation in Illinois, often performs abortions without anesthetic. According to one Michigan Avenue clinic's records, he also has performed two abortions simultaneously.

Two clinics defy state's inspectors

Thompson says surprise visits will continue; Page 5

Abortion without anesthetic: 'sadistic'



THE ABORTION PROFITEERS

'It's painful, real painful. I know he never gave me anesthetic.'

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pregnancies.

"Go get a pad and pencil to take down her name," Hah ordered our investigator in the middle of the abortion. "We can schedule [her sterilization] for Sunday."

AS HAH MOVED quickly that day from abortion to abortion, "You could hear the patients screaming," our undercover aide said. "All Hah's patients are in pain because he doesn't take time to give them the [pain-killing] injections," our aide was told by another employee.

After their abortions, our aide discovered, "Nearly all Hah's patients vomit from the pain."

Performing an abortion without any anesthetic is "a sadistic approach to medicine," said Dr. David Zbaraz, a gynecologist who performs abortions at Michael Reese Hospital.

Hah practices at two Chicago clinics: the Michigan Avenue Medical Center at 30 S. Michigan and the Chicago Loop Mediclinic at 316 N. Michigan. In interviews, Hah's patients all recounted stories of excruciating abortions.

DILATING A CERVIX in preparation for an abortion is a careful and gradual procedure in the city's good abortion clinics. The muscular opening to the womb is slowly stretched with a series of progressively larger rods to accommodate the suction device used to empty the womb.

"But Hah, according to some of his former patients, 'just jabs the rod in,' as one put it, and turns on the suction machine."

Hah, 43, is a 1964 graduate of the Taiwan University College of Medicine, and, though he is not a board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist, he is a veteran of the legal abortion trade.

At the Chicago Loop Mediclinic, Hah's patients apparently are more likely to get anesthetics. But Hah may not wait for them to take effect.

Doctors "should wait a few minutes until the anesthetic becomes effective," said Dr. Abraham Lash, former director of obstetrics and gynecology at Cook County Hospital. "Otherwise, it is just cruelty to the patient for the doctor to go ahead."

SHIRLEY JEAN FISHER will testify to that. During her abortion at the Loop clinic, she said, she suffered "incredible pain" because Hah didn't wait for her anesthetic to work.

Fisher, 29, knew what Lidocaine felt like because, she'd had it before. "I'd get this tingling sensation in my hand when it started to work," she said.

But after giving her a Lidocaine injection, Fisher said, Hah "just started right in—one, two, three. I was sobbing. It was three minutes or less from the time I was led into the room, put on the table, given the anesthetic, given the abortion and out of the room."

Fisher's anesthetic finally took effect—in



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Doctors race each other in abortion derby

At the Chicago Loop Mediclinic, according to a former clinic nurse, Dr. Ming K. Hah and another physician, Ulrich Klopfer, compete to see who can perform the most abortions. "When Hah is here," another nurse said, "Klopfer really zips. Hah marks the patients on his leg, and if Klopfer sees that Hah's got a legfull, he goes like wildfire to catch up."

the recovery room.

Another Hah patient who asked Hah for an anesthetic is convinced she never got it. "I asked the doctor, 'Am I going to get an anesthetic?' He said, 'Sure, sure.' That's all he says is, 'Sure, sure, be quiet.'"

"Then he starts doing it real quick," said the 26-year-old mother of three. "It's painful, real painful. I know he never gave me no anesthetic. I know what it feels like to have your womb dead like that."

In Michigan, before Hah lost his license to practice there, he performed an abortion on a woman who still lives with the pain.

The woman is Rosa Naperstek Taft. Before the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Taft, an attorney, was at the forefront of the fight for legalized abortion.

Just a month after abortion was legalized, Taft, who was then 28, discovered she was pregnant.

The night before her abortion, she gathered with some friends who had dangerous illegal abortions in the past. "We all rejoiced that night about how I would be able to get a safe, legal one."

The next day, Taft went to the Planned Family Center in Detroit and paid \$150 for an abortion by "a Dr. Lee."

But Dr. Lee was, in reality, Dr. Hah. As a result of Hah's abortion, Taft said, "I almost died."

THE ABORTION ITSELF, Taft recalled, was "exceptionally painful. It hurt so bad and I was screaming so loud, they stuck a tampon in my mouth."

Within a week, Taft said, complications set in, but Hah misdiagnosed them. Taft finally signed herself into a hospital where Hah did not practice and spent eight months there, three months in intensive care.

According to the lawsuit she filed against Hah and the clinic where he was then working, doctors had to remove all her reproductive organs. Because of the infection from the botched abortion, Taft's physicians also had to remove her spleen, her colon and perform a tracheotomy after she developed breathing problems. Taft's physicians said she also suffered permanent damage to her heart, lungs and kidneys.

"It took a year before I could go back to work," Taft said. "I had to learn to talk

again, walk again. Every part of my body had been infected." The suit was settled out of court for \$600,000.

BUT TODAY, TAFT said, "I don't have a normal body. My abdomen looks like a sky map of the Grand Canyon. All my internal organs are taxed. I don't have a spleen. My voice is totally changed, and I have a lot of psychological scars that will be with me forever."

But, Taft added, "I'm lucky to have lived. . . . The problem isn't whether abortions should be legal or not. We need to have free and safe abortions available to women as a right. The problem is to get people out of abortions who are in it for profits only."

Taft was still in an intensive-care unit when Hah opened his own abortion clinic in a Detroit suburb.

But just 16 months after it opened, Hah's new clinic was closed down by health officials for "jeopardizing the health and safety" of patients.

During a series of inspections of Hah's Associated Medical Clinic in Livonia, health officials found:

- Instruments that were "dirty and worn to the point that the stainless-steel finish had deteriorated and the instruments were beginning to rust."
- Recovery room beds made with dirty linens.
- "Supposedly sterile instruments" encrusted with "dried matter."
- Instruments being "sterilized" with Tide detergent and surgical equipment, including the suction machine, being "cleansed" with plain water.

But the state's closure of Hah's clinic did not put him out of the abortion business. He still was performing abortions at the Planned Family Center in Detroit.

And Hah had begun working in yet another clinic on Chicago's South Side.

It was not Hah's abortion business but his curious gynecological practice that cost Hah his Michigan medical license.

Many of his patients were male. And, police said, most of them were going to Hah for drugs.

Hah gave out 384 prescriptions in four

Abortion speed, traps—an editorial in Views, Page 71.

months for the rarely used and dangerously addictive drug Dilaudid, the Michigan attorney general's office said.

The drug, medical experts testified at Hah's license revocation hearing in Michigan, is typically prescribed only for terminal cancer patients. But, the hearing officer ruled, Hah prescribed the drug "as a remedy for pain no more severe than headaches."

Police said Hah usually got \$50 for each 24-capsule prescription. Some of Hah's patients, police charged, turned around and sold the capsules on the street for \$10 to \$15 apiece.

Hah's license to practice medicine in Michigan was revoked on Dec. 3, 1975. By then he already had begun working, at least part-time, in Chicago.

BASED ON MICHIGAN'S action against him, Illinois initiated proceedings against

'In three minutes, I was led into the room, put on the table, given the anesthetic and given the abortion.'

Hah in September, 1976, and on Nov. 29, 1976, revoked his license.

Almost two years have passed; but Hah has managed to maintain his practice almost without interruption.

Within 10 days of the revocation order, Hah filed a complaint in Circuit Court challenging Illinois' right to take away his license based on his activities in Michigan. The state was enjoined from revoking his license pending a ruling on that complaint.

On Feb. 4, 1977, a Circuit Court judge upheld the order revoking Hah's license. Again, Hah appealed. The case was before the Illinois Appellate Court for a full 21 months before the court upheld the revocation Nov. 3.

On Monday, Hah took the first steps toward appealing the appellate court decision. And on Tuesday, the state moved to prevent Hah from practicing during the appeal process.

But during previous appeals, Hah continued to perform abortions at the Chicago Loop Mediclinic and the Michigan Avenue Medical Center. Last year, Medicaid paid him \$217,500 for his services to public aid patients. And by July of this year, Hah had already billed Medicaid for more than \$200,000 worth of work.

At both Chicago clinics, Hah gets paid by the abortion. Those who've watched him work think that's why Hah races—for the money.

At the Loop Mediclinic, Hah's contests

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Parenthood group hails abortion quiz

The Chicago area Planned Parenthood Assn. applauded Tuesday The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn. investigation of abortion clinics, calling it "a service to the community."

Marcena Love, chairman of the organization's board of directors, said "A woman faced with an unplanned pregnancy who is considering the alternative of abortion may feel alone, confused and frightened. She needs to know where to turn for reliable information. She also needs to know that the government will protect her right to high-quality care."

Love also said Planned Parenthood "enthusiastically supports" Thompson's intended crackdown on the medical abuses uncovered in the series.

"The answer to substandard practices is adequate inspection, evaluation and enforcement, not recriminalization," Love added.

Planned Parenthood provides, among other services, counseling on adoption, abortion and contraception.

Note to readers

Reliable abortion counseling should be obtainable from family physicians. Other organizations that are prepared to respond to women's health questions are:

• Planned Parenthood Assn., 55 E. Jackson, 322-4240.

• Health Evaluation Referral Service, 2757 N. Seminary, 248-0166.



IN 1973, Rosa Naperstek Taft, a Detroit attorney, was given an abortion by "a Dr. Lee"—in reality, Dr. Ming Kow Hah. Within a week, complications set in, requiring eight months of hospitalization. According to a lawsuit against Hah, settled out of court in her favor for \$600,000, the abortion caused her to lose all her reproductive organs, spleen and colon. "I don't have a normal body," she said. (AP Photo)

She meets Dr. Hah, loses spleen, colon



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'The abortion was exceptionally painful. It hurt so bad and I was screaming so loud they stuck a tampon in my mouth.'

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with another clinic doctor, Ulrich Klopfer, are a continual source of conversation.

"They compete to see who can get the most patients done," said a former Loop clinic nurse. "They'll ask each other, 'How many have you done?', or they'll ask the staff how many the other guy has done. . . . Klopfer would be having a cup of coffee and be on his last sip when he'd jump up and say, 'I'd better get going or Hah will have the whole recovery room full.'"

Hah keeps track of the number of abortions he has done by penciling marks on the pant leg of his surgical scrub suit. At the end of the day, he tallies his marks and totals how much he's owed.

"When Hah is here," a Loop clinic nurse said at a staff meeting, "Klopfer really zips. Hah marks the patients on his leg, and if Klopfer sees that Hah's got a legfull, he goes like wildfire to catch up."

BUT HAH'S PACE, BGA investigator Julia Rockler discovered, is hard to beat. While half a dozen medical experts consulted by The Sun-Times agreed that doctors should schedule their abortions a minimum of 15 minutes apart, Hah can easily average six to eight abortions an hour on busy days.

In fact, if Hah's own surgical records can be believed, Hah can do two abortions at a time. On Aug. 12, 1978, for example, Loop clinic records showed Hah performed two abortions—beginning to end—at 4:10 p.m. And on Aug. 16, he did it again, completing two at 2:20 p.m.

But in his haste, Hah's record keeping can get mixed up.

In at least one case, our investigator discovered that Hah was in such a hurry that he filled out a form for one abortion before it took place. In fact, this particular abortion—which, Hah wrote on the patient record, went "well"—never took place at all.

In another case, Rockler discovered a blank record for a patient who had undergone a Hah abortion three days before. Hah was asked to fill out the form—right down to the dimensions of the patient's uterus—from memory.

QUITE A FEAT for a doctor who rarely knows his patients' names. Dr. Antonio Scommegna, who teaches at the University of Chicago and performs abortions at Michael Reese Hospital, says a doctor who spends only two to three minutes on each abortion "can't even say hello to the patient."

The abortion itself "can be done in as short a time as five minutes, no shorter," Scommegna said. "The anesthetic takes at least two or three minutes to take effect."

Additional time is needed, he said, for the doctor to talk to the patient, "so she doesn't feel threatened by the doctor. You have to examine her first, then explain the procedure to her and assess whether she is going to be co-operative. There should be a bond between the patient and the doctor. Psychologically it is important. The patient needs to trust the doctor."

"We don't schedule more than one [abortion] every 15 minutes. We are not an assembly line."

Scommegna and almost a dozen other medical experts consulted during the investigation said they would never attempt more than 15 to 20 abortions in a day for fear that the monotony of the procedure and the resulting fatigue would endanger patient safety.

But Hah continued to perform abortions at a pace that frightened even his assistants—20, 30, 40 a day.

And between his patients' screams, our BGA investigator heard one Hah aide lament, "He's going to have to kill a patient before he learns."

NEXT: The people who staff the mills.