

## Opinion

# How Motherhood Made Me a Better Abortion Provider

By **Dr. Ghazaleh Moayed**

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"Are you still planning on doing abortions after you have your baby?" a colleague asked. I was visibly pregnant in my third trimester and pushing a patient to the operating room. I was surprised at the question. We were friends, and most of my coworkers knew I became a doctor in order to provide abortion care. "Of course I am, why?" I asked her. She replied: "I just thought it might be hard to do abortions once you have a baby yourself."

I became pregnant halfway through my second year of ob-gyn residency training. Despite working in a profession dedicated to the care of pregnant women, I was surprised to find that having a baby as a female resident is strongly discouraged. I immediately came under scrutiny from my superiors. There were “jokes” about forcing other residents to be on birth control to prevent spreading the disease. I was determined not to show any weakness in my training as a result of my pregnancy, and continued to work 80-hour weeks, study, mentor, lead care teams, and work 24-hour call shifts until I’d reached 37 weeks. I assisted in a 12-hour robotic surgery at the beginning of my third trimester. I performed a cesarean section the day before my own. Nothing was going to change.

But mastering the care of pregnant women had not prepared me for the challenges of motherhood. I was fortunate to have six weeks of leave, and I had never been more tired, physically challenged, or emotionally drained. I had also never been more joyous. I would look down at my son and weep as tidal waves of love would flow through me. Motherhood is a constant negotiation between mountainous joy and deep sorrow—with sorrow always threatening to swallow you whole. My joy was a privilege, one that depended on factors like my partner, my social support, and, important, my ability to choose when to parent.

I am often asked whether providing abortion care is hard as a mother—as if abortion somehow exists in a realm outside of motherhood. But motherhood is not an accidental or natural job; motherhood is a job done with intention. Holding my baby’s tiny hands in my own not only strengthened my commitment to providing compassionate abortion care but also exposed how I needed to commit to supporting mothers in all aspects of my care.

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I returned to work a different person. I had spent my pregnancy overworking to prove I was strong, but I returned committed to demonstrating vulnerability. I spoke openly

was hard.

My postpartum visits became longer. I stopped focusing on physical exam check boxes and shifted to psychosocial questions: How much are you sleeping? Who is helping you at home? How are you feeling emotionally? I spent extra time reassuring patients they were doing a good job, that they were enough. I openly talked to my abortion patients about their children and about motherhood.

There is no Mother's Day card to celebrate abortion. There are Mother's Day cards to celebrate giving hugs, wiping noses, and kissing boo-boos—actions that are seen as the core of how a mother expresses love for her children. For my patients who were not parents, and did not want to be at that moment, or who never want to be a parent, I recognize their abortions as an act of intentional motherhood. Choosing when to parent is an act of love. For my patients that were already parenting, I feel the deep love they had both for the children they had and for the pregnancies they were ending. Choosing an abortion is an act of love.

Recently I had a patient encounter that reminded me of that conversation I had with my colleague during my pregnancy. My patient came to her abortion procedure without her partner or a friend, but with her two small children. She couldn't secure child care and couldn't reschedule her abortion. As a mother I know how hard it can be to get anywhere with just one child. I told her we'd get through it together. As I finished the five-minute abortion procedure, we laughed about motherhood as her other child watched videos on my phone. We laughed about how demanding and obstinate toddlers can be, about the tribulations of potty training, and about how absolutely strange that "Daddy Finger" song is. I was wrong: Becoming a mother fundamentally changed everything.

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