

Dr. Corinne McLeod: Texas Pamphlet Violates Core Ethical Principle of Modern Medicine

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This past summer, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) announced that they would be accepting [comments](#) from the public on their controversial “Woman’s Right to Know” pamphlet. Texas law mandates that all doctors in the state who perform abortions must give this pamphlet to their patients in conjunction with a mandatory information session before their procedures. Being a doctor who plans on providing abortion care in Texas, I took it upon myself to painstakingly edit this document so I could provide the state with the most accurate medical information possible. After all, surely the goal is to provide people with the essential knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their bodies and about their health.

However, I quickly realized this document is so hopelessly biased as to be functionally useless; my annotations were an exercise in futility. “A Woman’s Right to Know” discusses supposed medical risks from abortion that have been discredited for decades as if there were legitimate scientific debate surrounding them. The fact is that there is no link between abortion and breast cancer or infertility. There is no “post-abortion syndrome,” or any major psychiatric disorder associated with abortion. But by forcing physicians to hand out this pamphlet to patients, it lends credence to these myths. It forces us to discuss these risks as if they are real, therefore making doctors complicit in the scare tactics of the “pro-life” movement. Furthermore, the state drastically downplays the very real risks surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. People are actually 10 to 12 times more likely to die from complications related to childbirth than from an abortion. There is, of course, no mention of this amongst the glossy pictures of delighted-looking pregnant women scattered throughout the pamphlet. In fact, [a Rutgers University study](#) found that 30 percent of Texas’ pamphlet is medically inaccurate.

One of the core ethical tenants of modern medicine revolves around informed consent, the concept of giving patients all the information they need to make decisions that are in keeping with the patients’ own personal values. By extension, this includes giving accurate information to the best of the physician’s ability. “A Woman’s Right to Know” forces doctors to violate this principle. Patients expect to be able to trust their doctors to provide them accurate information with regards to their care, which is what forms the basis of the doctor-patient relationship. The state of Texas forces any doctor even discussing abortion to undermine this relationship and violate the ethics of our profession by mandating this pamphlet’s distribution. The political agenda behind “A Woman’s Right to Know” undercuts the foundations of the trusting relationship doctors depend on to provide their patients with the best possible care. Putting aside personal politics, any medical professional should be concerned by the state’s partisan involvement in healthcare. With our fact-resistant political climate, any kind of evidence-based medicine could be up for legislation based on the political leanings of extremist policy makers.

I struggled to edit “A Woman’s Right to Know” for many hours until the entire document was basically a series of red ‘x’ marks and aggravated, high school English teacher-style scrawlings in the margins. And, much like many high school English assignments, there was little worth salvaging. Undeterred, I wrote my own pamphlet, complete with scientific citations and local resources for contraception and child-rearing assistance. The State, in their fervor against abortion, neglected to include these valuable services in the original document. If you’d like to use my version of the pamphlet to provide information to those in need, you can find it [here](#). It is freely available to anyone because I firmly believe that people deserve to have all the facts they need to make decisions for themselves. I became a doctor to help people live their best lives – protecting autonomy is essential to that goal.

Dr. Corinne McLeod is currently a resident physician at Albany Medical Center specializing in OB/GYN. She is originally from Austin and hopes to return to Texas to work in reproductive health.

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