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Focus Mid-South

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SEARCH

New OB/GYN—and birthing facilities—are on the way

by Robin Beaudoin | photos by Lisa Buser

Choices Memphis Center for Reproductive Health, a non-profit reproductive health clinic in operation since 1974, offering education, birth control, abortion, transgender services, and STD testing and treatment, makes plans to expand its services with a proposed Choices Birth and Family Center. A three-bed facility and meeting place to extend beyond fertility treatments to prenatal care, birth, and postpartum education is in the works, as Choices readies to launch a capital campaign. This full spectrum of services, with a second full-time OB/GYN, Dr. Susan Lacy, on staff joining Dr. Donna Randolph, makes Choices a unique health center not only in the Mid-South, but in the United States. CBFC would be the first fully licensed free-standing birthing center in Memphis.

While maintaining an active presence in the reproductive health advocacy debate, the center has taken steady strides to become Memphis' leader in LGBT health care

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equality in the form of reproductive health and family planning for all patients whether cis/trans, or HIV positive, taking advantage of fertility treatments, protective medications such as birth control, hormones or PrEP (a pre-exposure prophylaxis for additional HIV prevention).

They have become so good at treating every person, in fact, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation—the educational branch of the group—has recognized Choices Memphis Center for Reproductive Health for exhibiting all the LGBT equitable and inclusive qualities of its Health Equality Index (HEI).

The title of Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality extends equally to employment practices. This honor is bestowed on select (only three in Tennessee have qualified this year) medical facilities with a proven focus on equality in care: patient and employment non-discrimination policies, training in LGBT patient care for key employees, and equal visitation policies.

CHOICES: Memphis Center for Reproductive Health is the only one in the Mid-South. Executive Director, Rebecca Terrell is proud of the accomplishment, “CHOICES is honored to be the only Memphis organization recognized by the HRC... we deeply value inclusivity and equality, and the HEI certification process helps make these ideals reality in our clinic.” Terrell continues, “It is important to us to provide to the transgender community, and for them to be confident in knowing we are serving them.

It’s almost like a buddy system so that when a person who is transgender first goes to the hospital, they have someone with them to be their advocate, because you can’t know what reaction you’ll get from hospital staff. How can we make health care in general more acceptable and less anxiety-provoking to the transgender community?”

## CHOICES’ BIRTH CENTER

### GESTATION UNDERWAY!

Known for providing a broad menu of services including abortion, birth control, education, wellness and preventative services, STD testing and treatment, as well as LGBT and transitional services, Choices is expanding its horizons further in the future with a birthing center.

Choices serves over 3,000 men, women, and teenagers with a wide range of reproductive health services each year. This includes fertility services, so a birthing service seemed like a natural progression. Terrell notes, “The idea of offering prenatal care and birthing services has been part of our tradition and plan for the past

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four years or so. We've been working on it continually for about the past year.

We're just about to put a capital campaign together, purchase the property, and we're working with the architect for planning and design. We're just now giving it form and shape. There'll be three birthing suites, so we could accommodate three women in labor at any given time." The administration has been in the learning and planning process, and Director of Community Partnerships, Katy Leopard, explains why three beds is just the right number.

"In training at conferences, it would be unusual for a group of our size to have more than three women in labor at any one time. We will use a group model for prenatal care. In learning in doses about things like healthy eating, vaccines, it helps to have a cohort of women who are due near your same date."

Choices' clinician, a skilled trained midwife will guide patients through prenatal care and parent education (group classes are standard with a local hospital birth as well). Patients will have private time for exchange and exams during 30 minute visits.

The triage and referral of the right patients will be important to the success of the program and health of the parent and child. Terrell stresses that the right fit for the pregnancy is crucial.

"Birth center birth is for uncomplicated pregnancies and healthy women; it is the same criteria for women who may have a baby at home with a midwife."

The plan is to have a certified lactation consultant on staff, as well as a list of ancillary classes to add to the holism of the birth center. "We feel like this is something not available to women in Memphis right now, and we want Memphians to have access to all the options that there are. Our goal is for the mother to gain confidence in her judgment and her ability to provide nurturing care for her infant, then passing that confidence on to her child."

The new building will be at 1203 Poplar, west of the current location, and is as of yet unnamed. Between the capital campaign launch and the challenging legal restrictions on reproductive health clinics, the same "surgical center" restrictions challenging health clinics offering abortion, such as Choices, may also alter the requirements for a birthing center.

Leopard says "Our financials since 2005 are trending up. We are a real growing practice, so that is exciting. Choices is OUT. We're out there and open. Because of where we live, there is a stigma around talking about sex, much less HIV or any other health outcomes."

Memphis welcomes the safe health care—talking about sex and sexual health is pivotal

to disease prevention and patient empowerment. Eventually, Choices may merge all services to one facility somewhere down the road. With the help of financial backers and their quality lineup of support staff, the future is pregnant with possibilities.



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