

OPINION

Keep abortion safe and legal: Guest opinion

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By Guest Columnist

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Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-California, right, hugs Sen. Patty Murray, D-Washington, left, after speaking at a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington Jan. 21.

(AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

By Dr. Paula Bednarek

The political attacks waged on women's health in Congress and in state houses across the country have gotten out of hand. Decisions made by elected officials are effectively tying the hands of doctors and leaving our patients out in the cold.

Many of the restrictions introduced are purported to protect women, but they do the opposite. As lawmakers consider policy on women's health it's critical to listen to women's health care providers, who know that legal abortion is safe — and it will only stay that way if it remains legal and accessible.

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As an obstetrician-gynecologist with 15 years of experience caring for women, I work every day to keep women healthy. Studies show that three in 10 women in the United States have an abortion, and that abortion is one of the nation's safest medical procedures. Data show that abortion has more than a 99

percent safety record. U.S. women experience major complications from abortion less than 1 percent of the time, and in those rare cases when complications do occur, they are similar to those that may occur from miscarriage, which ob-gyns and other health care professionals treat every day.

Planned Parenthood has a national set of standards and guidelines based on the expert recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. As a high-quality provider of medical care to women across America, ensuring the health and safety of our patients is fundamental to each and every health care provider who works here. A woman who decides on abortion receives support throughout the process from a medical professional. Prior to the procedure, she completes a medical history and has blood testing. She learns how the process works, the range of normal symptoms to expect and the warning signs to look for.

It's been 42 years this month since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Roe v. Wade that a woman's constitutional right to privacy includes her right to abortion. Since then, opponents of women's health have been working tirelessly to chip away at access to safe and legal abortion by passing restrictions under the guise of protecting patient safety. As a result, more than half of all women of reproductive age live in a state where their access is being restricted.

Through my experiences working internationally in Africa and Asia, I have seen firsthand the complications that occur when abortion is illegal and inaccessible. As the largest nonprofit family planning and reproductive rights organization in Oregon and Southwest Washington, Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette works every day to make sure women have high-quality health care in a safe and respectful environment. That includes providing abortion for women if and when they make that decision.

I see women every day with many different reproductive health care needs. But one thing is constant: Every single woman needs the right to decide for herself — in consultation with her medical provider, her family and her faith — whether or not to carry her pregnancy to term. When these decisions are taken away from her, she is unable to get the health care she requires to remain healthy and to protect her future.

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To ensure that abortion remains safe and legal for future generations, we must replace stigma with the facts and start having honest conversations about abortion in America today.

Paula Bednarek, MD, MPH, is an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at OHSU, and co-medical director for [Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette](#).

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