



# 2013 Leadership Training Academy Fellows: Why I Provide

March 10 is the *National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers*. March 10 is the day in 1993 when David Gunn, MD, was murdered by an anti-choice extremist. To honor the courageous doctors who provide this much-needed service and to fight the stigma surrounding this safe, legal medical care, members of our current *Leadership Training Academy* class share their stories of why they provide and why they support their colleagues who provide.



Human rights. Equality. Justice. These are the utopian ideals that sum up why I provide abortions.

As a medical student, several of my colleagues spoke disparagingly of abortion and vowed to never talk to a patient about having one, much less provide. I was appalled...and motivated.

I spent a rotation my last year of medical school as an assistant in an abortion clinic. The women I saw came from every imaginable background. **I held the hands of physicians, teachers, administrators, students, mothers, nurses, and they held mine. Some cried, some told me their story; all were relieved to have someone to talk to.** Now in my fellowship I have met the same kind of women I met as a medical student: many amazing, strong women making difficult decisions for the well-being of their families, their children, themselves.

Why do any of these women face less compassion and dignity, and more judgment and legislation, than any other patient? No one has been able to answer this question--not in medical school, not in residency, and not in the awful rhetoric on posters, websites, and billboards--because there is no justification. And that is why I provide.

—Frances Casey, MD, MPH  
Washington, DC

I never questioned whether or not I would provide abortions--it was always a given. As an obstetrician-gynecologist, I see abortion as another part of the comprehensive care that I can provide my patients. **My conviction in my work as an abortion provider grows daily as I witness the hardships women must overcome to access this service and as I listen to their stories.** I am strengthened by their gratitude, yet dismayed that so many seem to expect to be judged or mistreated. No one ever expects or plans to have an abortion – an obvious statement, yet one that appears to be lost on so many today. It is never a decision made lightly, but rather is incredibly complex and individualized. It is also a decision that cannot and should not be made by anyone other than the woman herself with the support of her physician. Because of this I remain determined to not only provide abortion care, but to speak out on behalf of these women, to train others to provide, and to stand in solidarity with my colleagues.

—Amna Dermish, MD  
Salt Lake City, UT

As a physician specializing in adolescent medicine, I do not provide abortions myself--but **I fully support my colleagues who do this brave work and I don't know what we would do without them. Because of them, I can offer a scared teenager facing a seemingly powerless situation the solace of knowing that she has options.** Regardless of what she ultimately decides to do, without these providers, the decision would already be made for her.



—Julie Finger, MD, MPH  
New Orleans, LA

 [Dr. Andrea Jackson](#)

Early in my career I labeled abortion as another medical procedure that I needed to be proficient in order to provide comprehensive reproductive health care, but I actively tried not to think too hard about the role morality might play in my provision of abortions.

Recently, I had the opportunity to work abroad in a country where abortion was severely restricted and providers were rare. Rather than decreasing of the number of abortions, these restrictions resulted in a high incidence of illegal abortions...and death. Every day I took care of women who would come to the emergency room with severe hemorrhage, infection, and other tragic complications from these illegal abortions.

I always knew that access to safe and legal abortion was important to women's health; however, serving abroad showed me that it was not only important for their care, but also for their lives, and the lives of their families waiting for them at home. **After that experience I realized that the question was not whether it was moral to perform abortions, but whether it was moral for me as a physician not to.**

—Andrea Jackson, MD  
San Francisco, CA

**As a psychiatrist, I support abortion providers because  Dr. Angela Janis they protect women's most fundamental rights and allow every woman to make decisions that are best for her individual situation. Without them, health care would not be complete.**

Not only do they provide this care, they do it with added stressors that no other physician must face. That takes an amazing amount of dedication and courage.

I believe all physician colleagues have a duty to stand with providers and support them. Their patients are our patients. They help us deliver better, more complete, health care and we should express just how grateful we are for the work they do.

**—Angela Janis, MD  
Janesville, WI**

There are many reasons to why I provide abortion care. **I have seen the tragic consequences of illegal abortion while working outside of the U.S. I have also seen the difficult circumstances women face even in this country, where abortion is legal but access is often a challenge.** In every case, at the root of it all is a woman who needs help and who has taken steps to protect her well-being and her future. Everyone deserves to have access to the full spectrum of health care and for women, that includes abortion. I am proud to provide comprehensive women's health care. I also hope that one day, in the not- too-distant future, instead of asking physicians like me why we provide abortions, we will be asking those who don't, "Why not?"

**—Caron Kim, MD, MSc  
Los Angeles, CA**

 Dr. Kathy King

I provide comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion, because I believe it is a basic human right. One in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. **I refuse to allow stigma to stand in the way of providing high-quality medical care to these women.** The days of the medical community being silent on this issue must stop. Silence just perpetuates ignorance and shame. I believe that women are capable of thinking for themselves and making the best reproductive decisions for themselves and their family. They deserve to be treated with compassion and empathy, not be ridiculed or judged. As providers, we must stand up for reproductive justice and stand against the tactics of social control through shame and stigma.

**—Kathy King, MD  
Milwaukee, WI**

I provide abortions as part of comprehensive, compassionate  colleenk1 reproductive health care. Like many physicians, I was drawn to medicine with a strong desire to help people. And like many other public health crises--smoking, heart disease, diabetes--the burden of unplanned pregnancy largely falls on our most vulnerable and underserved populations. **It is truly my privilege to help patients through times when**

**often there are no easy decisions. I trust my patients, and value the trust they place in me.**

**—Colleen Krajewski, MD, MPH  
Baltimore, MD**

 **Dr. Colleen McNicholas** Many people, including many colleagues and patients, have asked me, “Why do you provide abortions?” The answer is quite simple actually.

I provide abortions because...

I value and respect women

I appreciate the importance and sanctity of motherhood

I recognize the impact an unplanned pregnancy has on education and opportunity

I have compassion for families facing pregnancy complications

I can relate to the complexities of health, economics, family, and faith

I provide abortions because...

We live in a society where preventive measures are not accessible by all

We live in a society plagued by violence against women

We live in a society that still confuses biological ability with the requirement to parent

We live in a society where ideology, not science, drives sexual health education

I provide abortions because...

I am a woman who may someday need one

**The real question is: Why wouldn't I provide abortions?**

**—Colleen McNicholas, DO  
St. Louis, MO**

I provide abortion simply because someone has to. Women everywhere face unplanned and complicated pregnancies. No amount of protesting or legislation will ever make that reality go away. Ever! Women will always need abortions. A woman who makes that decision, whatever her circumstances, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. She deserves compassion, and she deserves safe medical care. There are way too many people who want to deny women that basic right, and they do it by shaming women, threatening doctors, and chipping away at our freedom with ridiculous, harmful laws. My patients and my colleagues deserve better, and **providing abortion is my way of fighting back, of standing up for my patients, and for myself.**

**—Rebecca Mercier, MD, MPH  
Chapel Hill, NC**

I provide comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortions, to my patients because **I believe a woman should be able to control her body and her life.** As a physician, I am proud to be able to use my medical skills to help women in need.

**—Kate Shaw, MD  
Stanford, CA**

I provide abortions because I sometimes wonder who else would. I am a woman, and I am a physician, and frankly, I am scared. When I see the ever-increasing restrictions on this safe, legal medical procedure, I am scared that we physicians will lose our right to provide comprehensive health care to our patients. I am scared that someone I know--a friend or a family member or even myself--will be unable to continue a pregnancy, and that we'll have nowhere safe to turn. **I provide abortions because I am young, able, and skilled as an obstetrician/gynecologist, and because I want to offer the best and safest care to my patients. I provide abortions because women deserve to have that option, and more important, deserve to not have fear when they choose it.**

—Anonymous

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