

PARENTHOOD

Abortion services resume at new Planned Parenthood clinic in Flagstaff

LARRY HENDRICKS News Team Leader Feb 18, 2014 23

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The new Planned Parenthood center is located in the shopping center at 2420 South Woodlands Village Boulevard. The center has begun offering medical abortions after a two and a half year hiatus. (Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun)

Jake Bacon

Jake I

After more than two years without the service, the Flagstaff Planned Parenthood clinic is once again offering pill-induced abortions.

Bryan Howard, president of Planned Parenthood of Arizona, made the announcement on Monday at the new clinic site in west Flagstaff.

Women who have made the decision to terminate a pregnancy can elect to have an abortion between five and eight weeks at the Flagstaff clinic. These procedures involve medications and not surgery, which is not available at the clinic.

“It has been a priority to establish the service,” he said, later adding, “Now the care is based in your community.”

Planned Parenthood stopped the abortions at clinics in Flagstaff, Yuma and Prescott Valley in 2011 after the Legislature specified that only licensed physicians – not a nurse practitioner – could provide the abortion pill services and had to meet face to face with patients 24 hours prior to dispensing the pills.

A physician has only recently been found in Flagstaff who is available to meet with patients and administer the pills.

DISTANCE CREATED HARDSHIP

Beth Otterstein, clinician and center administrator, said that for the last 2 1/2 years, women in Coconino County who had decided on the pill abortion had to go to Phoenix or Tucson – putting considerable financial burden on women having to travel the extra distance.

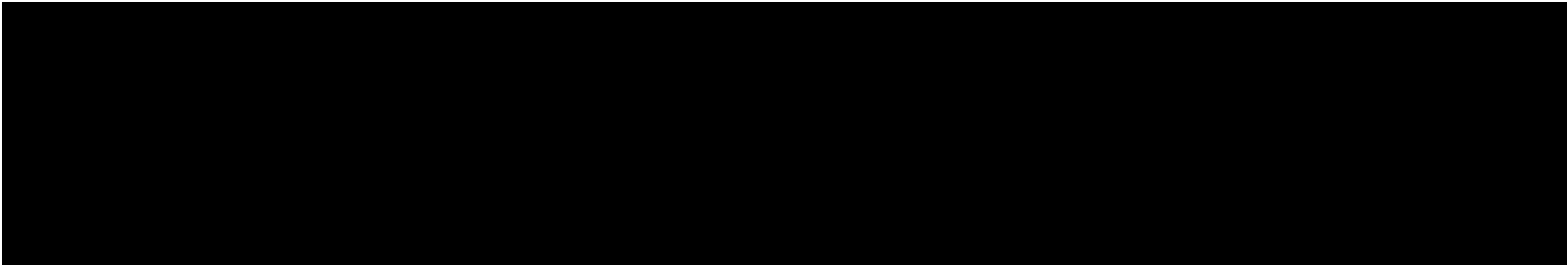
In a county as rural and remote as Coconino County, drive times would already be more than three hours for some women – particularly from American Indian reservations – and the additional distance caused hardships.

Abortions requiring surgery by a physician are not performed at the Flagstaff center, Otterstein said. Women who wish to terminate a pregnancy after eight weeks must go to

Phoenix or Tucson Planned Parenthood sites for those.

NURSE PRACTITIONER SIDESTEPED

Howard said it has taken this long to find a physician who could provide the service at the Flagstaff location. The physician will be available once a week on Tuesdays, and unlike before, an appointment is now necessary.




The law now requires that women seeking a medical abortion first undergo a face-to-face meeting with the physician. After a 24-hour waiting period, the woman may then be given the abortion pills. But, in Flagstaff, because the physician comes only one day a week, the next possible visit for a woman would be a week later.

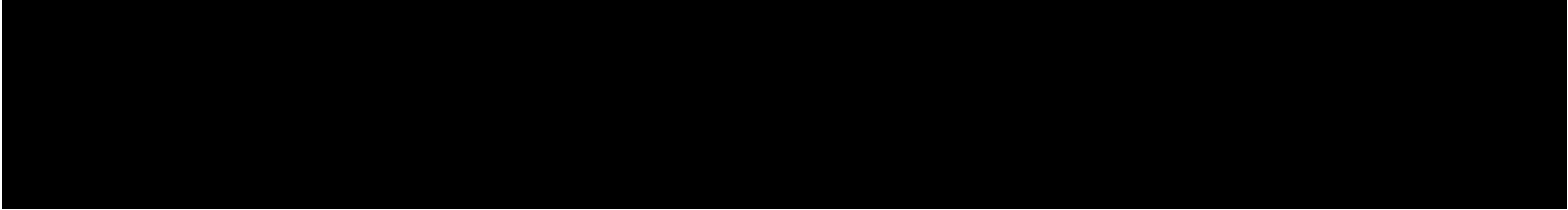
And, in April, when a new law is scheduled to take effect, it is possible that a physician also will be required to dispense the second round of the abortion medication, which is taken 24 hours after the first round. Currently, a patient can self-administer the second pill or a nurse practitioner can dispense it.

If that happens, it is possible the Flagstaff center will again have to end abortions, Howard said, unless a physician can provide that follow-up day of service as well.

The new regulations scheduled to go into effect in April would also reduce by two weeks the window in which the abortion pills can be administered

The two types of pills used for medical abortions — one to stop development of the fetus, and one to induce contractions — are effective at lower doses through the eighth week of pregnancy, Howard said. The new rules would eliminate the seventh and eighth weeks but do not reflect current medical research, Howard said.





After that, a surgical abortion, which is not available at the Flagstaff center, is legally possible up to 23 weeks.

NEW, EXPANDED LOCATION

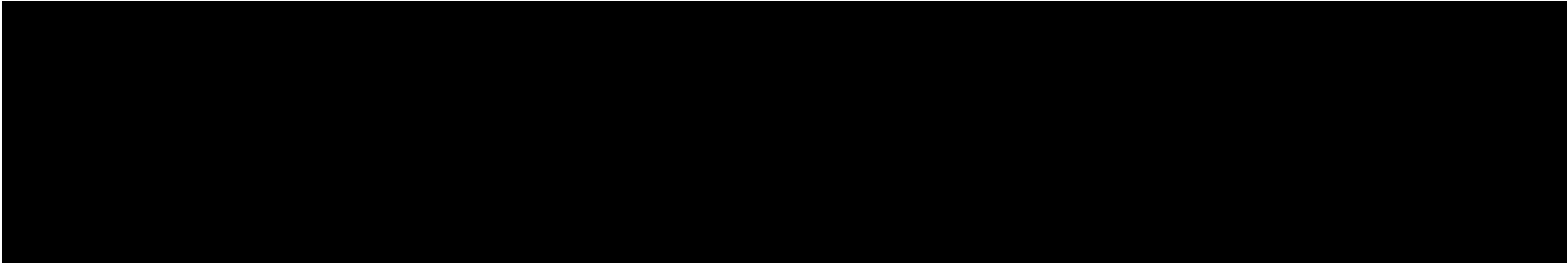
Before the pill abortion service was stopped in Flagstaff, the clinic was located on South Plaza Way. After more than a decade at that location, the center has now moved to the shopping center at 2420 Woodlands Village Blvd.

“This gave us the opportunity to expand,” Howard said. “It was an opportunity we decided to make the most of.”

The space has three exam rooms, administrative offices and a lab. Remodeling of the space cost about \$100,000, Howard said.

The Flagstaff center has a budget of about \$400,000, and sees between 2,000 and 3,000 clients a year. Before stopping the service in 2011, the center would get about 400 women a year seeking the pill abortion.

The Flagstaff center also offers reproductive health exams, birth control, testing for sexually transmitted infections, education and health information and clinic referrals.



Otterstein said the new Planned Parenthood location is close to Northern Arizona University for students, and the center has a cooperating agreement with NAU’s health clinic to provide a variety of services.

The clinic is located atop a hill in a retail shopping center, with large swaths of private property — mainly the parking lot — between the front door of the clinic and public sidewalks below where protesters are legally allowed to picket.

The location allows clients to enter the clinic without being intimidated or harassed by protesters, Otterstein said.

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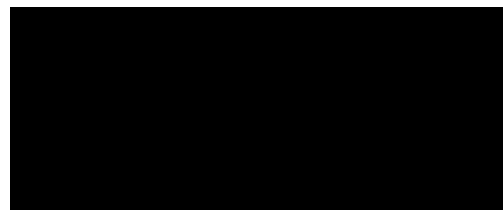
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