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Newark, DE Weather

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# Wilm. abortion clinic temporarily closes due to ongoing investigation

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The Planned Parenthood clinic in Wilmington that performs surgical abortions has temporarily closed its doors in the wake of allegations of “unsafe and unsanitary” conditions made by former nurses at the clinic.

Jayne Mitchell-Werbrich, a nurse who quit working at the clinic due to what she thought was an unsafe environment, said the conditions in the clinic put patients at risk.

“We had a doctor who was always very hurried and he would bring patients back and there would be blood on the examination table,” Mitchell-Werbrich said. “He couldn’t even wait until the room was cleaned because he was so quick to bring in the next patient.”

She also said there were no written guidelines for the staff to follow and the staff was not properly trained. She said even basic procedures, such as injecting patients with sedatives, was not done properly.

“They did not use the proper protocols and guidelines,” Mitchell-Werbrich said. “There just weren’t any.”

She said the way the procedures were being done was potentially very dangerous to the mother as well as the fetus.



File Photo

Previous employees claim the environment was unsafe and unsanitary.

In correspondence between the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Planned Parenthood, the state organization cited the clinic with two violations in February. According to the notification, "Health care employees performing tasks such as assisting with medical procedures and handling specimens were not trained in accordance with this item." The other citation reads, "Employees were exposed to contaminated needles following the administration of multiple employee PPD Tests with standard, non-engineered tuberculin syringes."

OSHA and Planned Parenthood of Delaware came to a settlement in February when a fine of \$3,060 was levied against the company. Other complaints submitted by Mitchell-Werbrich and other employees were found to be unsubstantiated through the investigation.

Ruth Lytle-Barnaby, the new CEO of Planned Parenthood of Delaware could not be reached for an interview. She said in a press release that the organization has launched a full review of patient services at the clinic.

"I determined that we need to take immediate steps to assure our patients of our high quality care, including enacting immediate personnel changes," Lytle-Barnaby said. "We do not tolerate employees that fail to meet our standards for patient care and services."

She said she is currently addressing the concerns with a team of medical experts from the national Planned Parenthood office. She is confident in the high quality of care at the office, she said, but if there is any employee who does not live up to their standards, they will be terminated.

Mitchell-Werbrich, a veteran nurse, said she had never experienced working conditions like those at clinic before and reported the issues to Planned Parenthood. She said she contacted the Planned Parenthood president and CEO, as well as the vice president of medical services for the organization, but neither took action against the doctors or the staff.

"I had told anyone who would listen that it was unsafe and about some of the numerous unsafe things that were going on," Mitchell-Werbrich said. "They said to me that they were working on it, but there was no change."

Professor of history and women's studies Anne Boylan stated in an email message that it is important to note that no Planned Parenthood clinic has been shut down but rather abortion services have been temporarily suspended at the clinic. She said the investigation and the suspension have come following pressure from groups against abortion in Delaware.

"An anti-choice group involving a Newark resident and retired UD employee Rae Stabosz has been pressuring state health regulators to investigate the clinics," Boylan said. "The tactic is part of a nationwide strategy by anti-choice groups to make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to seek safe legal abortions."

Boylan was discussing the "40 Days for Life" campaign, an effort to protest abortion clinics

using prayer rallies outside the buildings.

Mitchell-Werbrich said the issue for her is not issue with abortion services in general but the safety of her patients. She said she went into the clinic as an objective nurse but left fearing for the women who were treated there.

In her view, things are looking better, she said, since the clinics are currently undergoing an investigation, and hopes the clinic can clean up and reopen so women can once again have access to affordable healthcare.

“They are having a massive cleanup and that is what they really needed to do,” Mitchell-Werbrich said.