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Abortion Facility : Hospital Called Out of Control, Closed by State

February 11, 1988 | JAMES RAINEY and BARBARA BAIRD | Times Staff Writers

State health officials ordered the closure Wednesday of an Inglewood hospital that specializes in abortions, charging that the high-volume facility had endangered the health of its patients.

Inglewood Women's Hospital, the state's busiest abortion hospital, was forced to close its doors late Wednesday after administrators were served with an order that accuses the facility of providing patients with inadequate care.

But Dr. Morton Barke, the hospital's owner and chief of staff, told reporters he will seek a court order today to reopen the hospital. He said he also believes that state law will permit doctors to continue to see patients for office visits.

License Suspended

The state order calls for the hospital to remain closed, with its license suspended, pending a hearing and final ruling by state regulators. State Director of Health Services Kenneth W. Kizer must decide within 90 days whether the hospital's license will be permanently revoked.

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The hospital will be permitted to complete its care of 21 patients who have already registered for treatment there, said Ralph Lopez, director of the health facilities division of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services.

Lopez, who served the order for the state, called the Inglewood facility "a hospital out of control."

The hospital performed 11,330 abortions in 1986, according to state health regulators, or nearly one-quarter of the abortions performed that year in California hospitals. Figures for 1987 have not yet been compiled.

Barke called Lopez an "anti-abortionist" who had been pressured into closing the hospital. "We have been harassed by anti-abortion groups up and down the state and across the country for years," Barke said.

Lopez refused to respond to claims that health officials had been politically pressured.

Barke also said the hospital had corrected alleged deficiencies in its operation that had been pointed out after several inspections by health officers.

Complaints on Hygiene

Wednesday's order follows months of controversy at the hospital. County health inspectors in December reported unsanitary conditions and patients who were neglected under what Lopez described as "battlefield conditions."

Inspectors said that patients were rushed through a single operating room, where the blood of previous patients still stained the tables and floors.

The hospital had been notified earlier this week that it would be subject to more frequent inspections that could lead to a suspension of its federal Medicare and Medi-Cal funding.

Most of the charges in Wednesday's order centered around the use of anesthesia. Some patients did not receive appropriate amounts of anesthesia, while others were not evaluated before or after they were sedated.

The hospital, located at 426 E. 99th St., also failed to keep proper anesthesia records for some patients and falsified documents describing patient evaluations, according to the 37-page suspension order.

Proper procedures to prevent spread of infection were not enforced, the order charged, and patients were discharged even though they had not been evaluated by a doctor.

"The accusations were serious enough that we suspended operation of the hospital and then we can make a final determination" about revocation of the license, said Paul Keller, a state health services administrator.

The clinic also faces several lawsuits, including one stemming from the January death of a patient who allegedly bled to death after her uterus was perforated during an abortion.

Multiple Citations

The hospital was cited a total of five times in 1986 and 1987 for violations of the state Hospital Code and other laws. Each time, the hospital submitted a required correction plan and was permitted to remain open.

A hearing before an administrative law judge must be held within 30 days of Wednesday's suspension order. The judge will then make a recommendation to Kizer, who will have another 60 days to decide whether the hospital should be permanently closed.

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