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Abortion procedure caused death of Riverside woman, lawsuit alleges

By JONATHAN ABRAMS
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The mother of a Riverside woman who died of toxic shock syndrome after allegedly undergoing an abortion procedure at Planned Parenthood filed a malpractice suit against the organization and a Riverside County hospital this week.

The lawsuit alleges that Edrica Goode, 21, went to a Planned Parenthood clinic in Riverside for an abortion Jan. 31 and that a nurse inserted cervical dilators, used to gradually expand the cervix in preparation for second-trimester abortions, despite the fact that Goode had a vaginal infection.

The dilators, which are shaped like small sticks and consist primarily of seaweed, became a conduit that spread the infection to the rest of her body, the lawsuit alleges.

Goode, a Riverside Community College student who enjoyed traveling and reading, died Feb. 14.

"My daughter made a choice, but she didn't choose to die," said Aletheia Meloncon, Goode's mother, who said her daughter hadn't told her she was seeking an abortion. "A lost dog gets more attention than my daughter did. This has really torn at my family."

Goode did not return to the clinic to have the dilators removed, even though the devices are supposed to stay in place only one or two days, the lawsuit states.

According to Goode's patient profile at Planned Parenthood, which is in her mother's possession, Planned Parenthood mailed two letters to Goode stating the dilators needed to be taken out.

But Meloncon said the family never received the letters. She also contends that Planned Parenthood should have taken more aggressive steps to contact her daughter.

Vince Hall, director of communications for Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside counties, said his office could not comment on pending litigation. But he said that the "health and safety of our patients is our highest priority."

Planned Parenthood bills itself as the "nation's leading sexual and reproductive healthcare advocate and provider." Its services include abortion procedures; emergency contraception; screening for breast, cervical and testicular cancers; and counseling.

Goode's is the third known death among Planned Parenthood patients in California in the last four years. Holly Patterson, 18, of Livermore, Calif., died of an infection after a nonsurgical abortion in 2003. Diana Lopez, a 25-year-old Huntington Park woman, bled to death a year earlier after her cervix was punctured during the procedure.

Meloncon's lawsuit was filed in Riverside County Superior Court on Tuesday.

After the dilators were inserted, Goode began to experience fevers and started vomiting, Meloncon said. She became mentally unstable, not knowing what the day was and acting aggressively, her mother said.

The dilators are meant to stay in place over one night, and the abortion usually occurs the following day.

With her condition deteriorating, Goode was taken to Riverside County Regional Medical Center in Moreno Valley on Feb. 4.

A hospital blood test confirmed that Goode was pregnant, and Meloncon said she asked that a pelvic

examination be performed. The hospital, the lawsuit contends, said it couldn't perform one because Goode would not consent.

"She was confused and disorientated," Meloncon said. "It was totally out of character for what her behavior normally is."

After staying in the medical ward five days, Goode was transferred to a psychiatric unit and then immediately returned to the medical ward, the lawsuit contends. Before the transfer, the lawsuit states, Goode received a gynecological consultation, but no pelvic examination was performed to remove the seaweed sticks.

"If it wasn't for the negligent medical care that Edrica Goode received, she would be alive today," said Jack M. Schuler, Meloncon's attorney.

A Riverside County Regional Medical Center spokesperson said the hospital could not comment on a pending lawsuit.

After Goode returned to the medical ward, her condition continued to deteriorate, Meloncon said. The hospital, she said, performed a pelvic examination Feb. 13 and found the seaweed sticks and gauze. Goode had a miscarriage that day and died the next.

A Riverside County coroner's report listed the causes of death as toxic shock syndrome, prolonged retention of laminaria cervical dilators and intrauterine pregnancy.

"They need to do things different so that patients won't be in risk of great injury or death," Schuler said.

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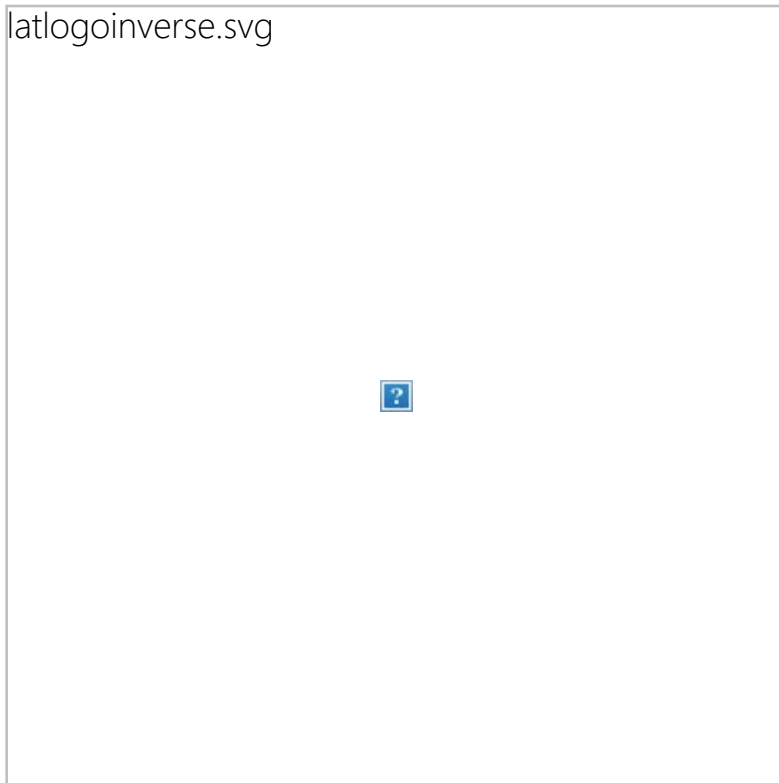
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