



# Doctor Investigated In Abortion Allegations

**ROBBY TRAMMELL, NOLAN CLAY**

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SHAWNEE - A bankrupt Shawnee doctor came under investigation after former employees claimed he was performing illegal late-term abortions in a bedroom of his home and police recovered a dismembered fetus from trash outside his residence, The Oklahoman has learned.

A nurse told investigators abortion instruments, including special-made forceps with sharp teeth, were sterilized in a home dishwasher.

Dr. Sidney C. Laughlin, 40, denied performing late-term abortions. However, the osteopath would not say whether he has done abortions inside his two-story home across the street from a Shawnee elementary school.

"I'm not going to say anything about that," said Laughlin, a former associate of Shawnee doctor Nareshkumar Patel. Patel became the focus of national attention in April for burning 55 aborted fetuses in a Pottawatomie County field.

Prosecutors determined no criminal charges could be filed against Patel.

The Oklahoman also has learned that Laughlin is a target of a drug diversion and Medicaid fraud investigation being conducted jointly by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration and the Oklahoma attorney general's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit.

A federal grand jury, which is to hear evidence against Laughlin, is scheduled to reconvene Tuesday in Oklahoma City. This investigation is unrelated to the abortion allegations, authorities said.

Attorney general spokesman Gerald Adams said his office would neither confirm nor deny any pending investigation.

Defense attorney Merle Gile, who represents Laughlin, said: "I can tell you this: There's going to be a trial if they indict him.

"We're sure going to defend (the doctor) ... He denies any wrongdoing. Nobody welcomes any type of indictment or any type of investigation, but ... the government does what they're going to do. And if they do it, we're ready to defend it." The Oklahoma City attorney was asked if Laughlin did abortions in his home. "I really can't even comment on that, because I don't know anything. Anything I've ever had anything to do with has nothing to do with any abortions," Gile said.

In a sworn statement, nurse Gayla Ennis, 36, reported to authorities that she had helped Laughlin in performing four or five abortions at his home at 1811 N Beard last year and he then "used the dishwasher to sterilize his equipment." The nurse stated she stopped assisting Laughlin after he aborted a fetus at his home that "looked about 28 weeks based on (the) complications of delivery (and) the head size on ultrasound." State law prohibits abortions beyond 24 weeks of development.

"I was shocked and after that one didn't help him anymore with anything," said Ennis, now a nurse at an Oklahoma City hospital.

She also reported that Laughlin had "a hard time with this case." She told authorities the 36- to 38-year-old mother was a 300-pound woman who said she had been raped.

Last December, Shawnee police set up a surveillance of Laughlin's home from inside the school. Investigators watched and videotaped the home for two weeks. Police reported, however, he was not seen doing abortions from the home then.

Police did report finding a dismembered fetus in one of 20 trash bags taken from outside his home. The state medical examiner determined the fetus was 16 weeks old from the size of its foot.

"Definitely identifiable human tissue consists of a right and left arm, both of which have been dismembered at the shoulder joint," the autopsy states. "A portion of the midbody is seen ...

consisting of the back and buttocks.

"This specimen contains a definitely identifiable spinal cord with numerous organs of which a kidney is observed. Also present are right and left leg and foot, all having definitively identifiable digits as do the hands.

"There is a head portion also present which has been macerated and opened and shows no definitive brain, but fragments of what appear to be brain tissue are observed with the remains. ... The head has also been dismembered from the remaining portion of the body. " The medical examiner also reported finding placental, embryonic and unidentifiable tissues in seven other trash bags, as well as heavily blood-stained absorbant pads, gauze pads, rubber gloves, an empty syringe and a pack of cigarettes.

Records available since 1990 show that the Patel and Laughlin investigations are the only ones where autopsies were performed on discarded fetuses in Oklahoma.

"No, I was not aware of any police investigation whatsoever," Laughlin told The Oklahoman in a telephone interview last week from his Central Oklahoma Women's Clinic at 3330 NW 56 in Oklahoma City. "I didn't know anything about it. I guess if something had been wrong they would have said something about it. " Shawnee police chief Hank Land said officers were frustrated that they were not able to come up with sufficient evidence or state laws to warrant charges. Police had interviewed former employees and had attempted to question at least one former patient, he said.

Land said the patient, who had undergone an abortion, would not cooperate with investigators.

The police chief said he was outraged that officers found fetal remains with household garbage in a residential area near a school.

"How would you like for your dog or child to drag something like that home?" he said.

Laughlin denied he disposed of any fetuses in the trash from his home and said he "had no idea" why police would say a fetus was found in trash picked up outside his house.

"Well, I'll tell you ... there is no truth to that," he said.

"I've always disposed of them through a medical (waste company), through the proper regulations according to the state health department. In fact, you can look at all the contracts we've had with our medical waste company. " He said he is careful not to do abortions on women who are in their third trimester - the last three months of pregnancy.

"I have never done a third-trimester abortion," he said. "Those are always if women are over the legal age limit, which in the state of Oklahoma is 24 weeks, according to statutes. We don't even touch them. " He also said: "Any procedures that we've done have been within the legal limits, I will tell you that for a fact. We have ultrasound documentation on everything. " Asked if it's improper or illegal for a doctor to perform abortions at home, Laughlin replied: "Not that I was aware of ... I have always tried to do things according to the right way and the regulations. " Oklahoma had a law requiring second-term abortions "to be performed or induced in a general hospital," but the state attorney general in 1984 found that restriction was unconstitutional.

Oklahoma has no law preventing a doctor from doing first-trimester or second-trimester abortions in his home, the state health department's attorney, Robert Cole, said. "There is nothing in the public health codes that he would be violating. " Oklahoma had no law on fetus disposal until after the Patel controversy.

In May, the Oklahoma Legislature directed the state health department, the state medical board and the state osteopaths board to come up with regulations for fetus disposal. Under the new law, a violation of the regulations could result in a \$10,000 fine.

"The equipment in ... (Laughlin's) home was his exam table, ultrasound, suction machine, IV-pole and supplies, medications, instruments," nurse Ennis told authorities. "He used the dishwasher to sterilize his equipment. " He later bought an autoclave for sterilization, she said.

"Sid had a few special instruments that he had special ordered," Ennis stated in a sworn statement. "They were 12 to 14 inches long, had a 1- to 2-inch head with sharp teeth on the forceps part that he used to break up body parts.

"I understand that this was the normal procedure for older abortions. " The nurse also told authorities that she believed Laughlin discarded aborted fetuses in his trash. "He carried stuff out to his trash can the last time she helped him," a police report stated.

Ennis told The Oklahoman , "He told me ... it was legal for him to do abortions in the home. He had his license ... his DEA number and everything transferred to his home address and it was OK. " Ennis said she worked 22 months for Laughlin, and claims he still owes her \$3,000 in back wages.

The nurse said she will testify Wednesday before the federal grand jury concerning the Medicaid investigation.

A former office manager, Darla Kinnamon, 30, said she also is to appear before the grand jury to testify about Laughlin's Medicaid problems. She worked at his Shawnee clinic, called New Beginnings, from April 1990 to June 1991.

After leaving, she said, she went to Laughlin's house three or four times to pick up back wages and he showed her the downstairs bedroom he had converted into an exam room.

"He said, 'This is my exam room. This is where I'm doing abortions,' " she said.

Kinnamon said Laughlin often bragged about doing late-term abortions. She said she is now embarrassed she worked for him. "He laughed about dismembering babies," she said.

One abortion foe, the Rev. Anthony Nelson, said members of his group, the Oklahoma Pro-Life Action Network, have called Laughlin posing as women needing abortions.

"We have had him agree to do late-term abortions when women in our group have called him and asked him if he would," said Nelson, a Russian Orthodox Church priest.

Last year, Laughlin also gave a woman with the anti-abortion group an address to come for an abortion and "it was his home," Nelson said.

Nelson said a Shawnee police detective was told of the group's investigation of Laughlin.

Laughlin is a 1981 graduate of the Oklahoma College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery in Tulsa.

He had a practice in Perkins for a while before leaving Oklahoma to do his residency training in obstetrics and gynecology in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

He ran a women's clinic in West Virginia in 1988 and 1989, then operated the clinic in Shawnee after returning to Oklahoma in 1989.

Former employees told authorities Laughlin began doing abortions in his home about May or June 1991 after closing his clinic.

He resigned his staff privileges at Mission Hill Memorial Hospital in Shawnee, effective June 30, 1991, and filed for bankruptcy on July 2, 1991. In bankruptcy filings last August, he reported \$943,155 in debts, including \$162,000 in back taxes. He reported only \$6,100 in assets.

It was his second bankruptcy, the earlier one having been filed in 1985. He began working at the Central Oklahoma Women's Clinic in October. BIOG: NAME:

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