

RealChoice

Preparing for a Post-Roe America

Saturday, December 28, 2019

A Point I'd Missed for Years

Her Medical Clinic wasn't even a real clinic. It truly deserved the name "fake clinic." If I'm reading it right, it was just Leo Kenneally's private practice, just a doctor's office.

Her Medical Clinic is where the fatal abortion were perpetrated on [Donna Heim](#), [Liliana Cortez](#), and [Michelle Thames](#), and where Maria Soto died of injuries after being left unattended.

Donna was the first to die, in August of 1986. She was given medication that was not appropriate for a patient with asthma and then was not properly resuscitated. Her mother, Barbara Heim, told the *Daily News* of Los Angeles County, "I thought they'd close the door so no one else would die." But a month after Donna's fatal abortion [Liliana Cortez](#), another woman with asthma, also died after an abortion at Her Medical Clinic. Eighteen-year-old [Michelle](#) suffered a seizure during her abortion at Her Medical Clinic on November 17, 1987. She died later that day. Her family filed suit, claiming that Her Medical Clinic staff had made inadequate attempts to resuscitate Michelle.

The battle over Kenneally's medical license turned political after it was suspended by the medical board over the appalling conditions at Her Medical Clinic. Former state medical board executive director Dixon Arnett's said that Leo F. Kenneally's case was "the most egregious I have seen, bar none." But a judge restored Kenneally's license on the grounds that he was doing a public service "providing abortions" in an "underserved area."

The investigation of patient deaths wasn't the first time Kenneally got in trouble. His license had been suspended in 1979 for Medi-Cal theft, and previously in 1975 for records-keeping violations.

Los Angeles Times May 5, 1990 State Panel Accuses MD of Negligence in 3 Deaths

By VIRGINIA ELLIS
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A Los Angeles physician has been accused of gross negligence and incompetence in the deaths of three young women who died shortly after undergoing abortions.

The Medical Board of California said Dr. Leo F. Kenneally, who operates Her Medical Clinic in South Los Angeles, neglected to follow emergency life-saving procedures when the women developed complications while undergoing the operation.

In a 53-page explanation of the charges, the board said Kenneally caused the death of Donna K. Heim, 20, of Covina in August, 1986, by failing to get her breathing again after she developed respiratory problems during an abortion.

A month later, the board said a second woman, Liliana Cortez, 22, who like Heim was an asthmatic, suffered a seizure during an abortion. Instead of "appropriately managing her life-threatening emergency," the board said Kenneally continued to perform the abortion. It said the woman was pronounced brain dead a few minutes later.

On Nov. 17, 1987, the board said, 18-year-old Michelle Thames of Lynwood died of brain damage caused by lack of oxygen. It accused Kenneally of taking too long to call paramedics when it was apparent her heart had stopped during the abortion.

The board also accused a second doctor, Mahlon Douglas Cannon, of repeated negligent acts and incompetence in the deaths of Heim and Cortez.

In both cases, the agency asked that the licenses of the two doctors be revoked or suspended.

Kenneally's attorney, Alan R. Freedman, said the doctor will challenge the charges in an administrative hearing. He said he expected to prove that there was "no medical malpractice" on Kenneally's part. Cannon, who no longer practices in Kenneally's office, could not be reached for comment.

MD: Board Accuses Doctor of Gross Negligence in 3 Deaths

Freedman said it was curious that the medical board had waited until now to file charges against Kenneally when the deaths of two of the women had occurred as long ago as 1986.

"If the evidence is so clear here and such terrible things were being done, why did it take them three years to file an accusation?" he asked.

He accused the agency of how-

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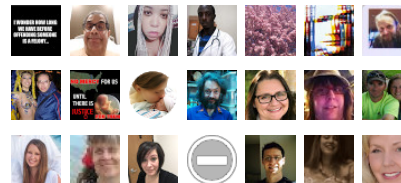
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ing to pressure from anti-abortion protesters and what he said was his own prejudice toward physicians who perform abortions in an office setting.

While being questioned by one of the board's medical consultants, Freedman said Kenneally was told that it was board policy that "abortions should never be performed in an outpatient setting."

"We believe that the medical board in its own way is trying to legislate new law so they're trying to close down the outpatient clinics which are performing abortions," Freedman said.

He described Kenneally's clinic

at 2700 S. Figueroa St. as serving mostly poor and mostly black and Latino women. If the doctor is ultimately forced to give up his license, he said, the clinic will be closed.

"This man is not dangerous to the community," he said. "He's been working in the community for years and years and he's helped so many women."

A spokeswoman for the medical board blamed the long delay in filing charges against Kenneally on the "complexity" of the case. She noted that the board had cited several additional cases that had not resulted in patient deaths but where it believed that Kenneally had been negligent in treating women who suffered complications during an abortion. She said it took a long time to investigate those cases.

Although the Los Angeles County district attorney's office also conducted preliminary investigations into the deaths of the three women, a spokesman said there are no plans to file criminal charges against Kenneally.

But Robert Schirn, head deputy district attorney for special crimes, added: "These things are always open if there is some additional evidence that comes to light that would show lack of medical care warranted a criminal filing."

Times staff writer Dean Murphy also contributed to this article.

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▶ [2017](#) (86)

▶ [2016](#) (213)

▶ [2015](#) (150)

▶ [2014](#) (197)

▶ [2013](#) (247)

▶ [2012](#) (292)

▶ [2011](#) (491)

▶ [2010](#) (564)

▶ [2009](#) (647)

▶ [2008](#) (1071)

▶ [2007](#) (831)

▶ [2006](#) (821)

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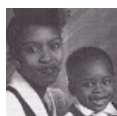
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