

HEALTH

Regions Hospital to stop providing elective abortions

Activists claim victory, but St. Paul hospital cites business considerations. The hospital cited falling numbers and other providers nearby. But abortion opponents say protests forced Regions to close its reproductive health clinic.

By **WARREN WOLFE** Star Tribune | **NOVEMBER 25, 2011 — 10:46PM**

Regions Hospital in St. Paul said Friday that it will stop performing elective abortions after Dec. 9, when it closes its reproductive GYN Special Services Clinic.

The hospital said it reached the decision because the number of abortions has been falling for years and other clinics in the Twin Cities provide similar services. Abortion opponents, however, said their years of protests forced the action.

Regions declined to address that claim.

"We're confident that patients will find the care they need from other [abortion] providers in our community," Chris Boese, vice president of patient care at Regions, said in a written statement. Regions is part of the HealthPartners care system.

Regions is the last remaining hospital in the Twin Cities area that performs elective abortions, officials said. Last year it performed 545 abortions, down from 902 a decade earlier. But it ranked just sixth overall among abortion providers in the state last year. Each of the five larger providers performed more than 1,000 abortions in 2010.

The largest, Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, which performed 4,033 abortions last year, will open an expanded clinic and administrative office in the Midway area of St. Paul next month.

Regions officials said the closing is consistent with other actions in recent years. It has moved some clinical care away from the hospital to make access easier for patients, and stopped other services that are available elsewhere, as it did two years ago with bariatric weight-reduction surgery.

The closure will affect fewer than 10 employees, who will have jobs elsewhere at Regions.

The leader of Pro-Life Action Ministries said the hospital and HealthPartners were forced to close the clinic because of years of protests by abortion opponents. That included 4 1/2 years of twice-yearly 40-day vigils; the latest included a visit from Catholic Archbishop John Nienstedt and ended Nov. 6.

"They've been performing abortions since the mid-1970s and they did nothing but abortions," said Brian Gibson, Pro-Life Action Ministries executive director. "We're elated that they're closing."

He acknowledged that Regions abortion clients likely will go to other area clinics.

Regions spokesman Jeff Shelman declined to respond to Gibson's claim of victory, but said abortion is just one service in the clinic, which also offers sterilization and other birth control services.

Regions will continue to offer abortions "like other hospitals in the community ... in rare situations when high-risk patients require hospitalization as part of their care," he said. Last year, state records show, 29 such emergency procedures were performed.

Planned Parenthood is not troubled by Regions' decision, said spokeswoman Jen Aulwes. "Regions notified us about this several months ago," she said. "We are not concerned. Women will still have access to the full range of services as they need them."

The number of abortions in Minnesota and nationally has dropped sharply in recent years.

Last year, the Minnesota Department of Health reported 11,505 abortions, including 29 emergency procedures to protect the mother's physical health.

Abortion became legal in the United States in 1973. The state began keeping records in 1975, and the peak year for elective abortions was 1980, with 19,028.

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