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Tanisha's Nightmare at Volunteer Medical Clinic

Botched abortions at the *Lime 5* clinic

Tanisha's Plight

A suit on behalf of Tanisha R., age 15, alleged that the girl "was kind of hysterical," and consulted with her aunt Cathy, then age 23-24, upon learning she was pregnant.

Cathy "told me that I should have an abortion because it would be the best thing for me." Tanisha "didn't really necessarily agree with it, but I went along with it... I really didn't know what I wanted to do at that time. I was confused, I didn't know exactly anything."

Cathy called Volunteer Medical Clinic, and scheduled an abortion for August 2, 1990.

Cathy's friend Linda was involved. Tanisha said that Linda "didn't talk to me about options or anything ... she had told me she had experienced the same thing, and that was basically it."

Tanisha had contacted the baby's father, asking him to help support the baby, but he insisted she could not have become pregnant because he "used the withdrawal method," and he "wasn't going to support me or anything."

Linda -- the aunt's friend -- took Tanisha for the abortion appointment.

Tanisha's Understanding

Tanisha was given forms to fill out. Linda wrote "not sure about" under medical history. Tanisha checked "yes" to having had local anesthetic, but "I thought -- when I saw anesthetic, I thought it was like what an anesthesiologist put on you, I thought it was a gas mask," and she had undergone foot surgery as a child under general anesthesia, so she thought that meant yes, she had experienced local anesthetic.

Tanisha also checked "yes" for migraine headaches because she had experienced headache which Cathy had told her was a symptom of pregnancy.

A woman then gave Tanisha a form to read. Tanisha later said, "I questioned the lady about what all of this was. She just said -- she told me that it was just in case for medical insurance in case something had happened or something, I didn't understand what she was talking about it, but I signed it."

Tanisha tried to read the form but didn't understand it; she said "I didn't even know what a uterus was at that time. ... I didn't particularly understand any of this that I had read. ... I didn't understand what all that paracervical, and I didn't really understand any of this to tell you the truth. All these words to me seems like pretty big words, I don't understand them."

When asked in her deposition to read parts of the form, she asked, "What is uterine?"

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"I asked her to go over it with me, and she told me it was just a general consent form just giving consent to perform an abortion. ... She didn't explain anything else."

Tanisha's description of how pregnancy occurred was that the baby grew in the stomach, that the egg came from the stomach (she didn't know what an ovary was), and "a little fish, a little fish -- if the little fish gets inside the woman, then that's how you get pregnant. ... I think -- and the little fish is the sperm."

Her understanding of abortion was "It was going to be some kind of procedure -- I don't understand, I didn't really understand the procedure. I just know they said they were going to perform it."

Tanisha recalled being told something about suction. In virtually identical affidavits, clinic employees Deborah J. Walsh and Lisa G. Thomas state that Tanisha "was coherent, capable of understanding the counseling information provided to her, competent to give her consent and authorization for the abortion procedure, and capable of understanding the contents of the consent forms which she signed."

Tanisha's Doctor

In his deposition, [Edward Perry](#), who performed the abortion, described Tanisha as "more articulate than the average," and said that he took her to be 17 or 18 years old, and she displayed "an attitude of a desperate girl who wanted that over with."

Didn't he check her chart? As we read Perry's words about decisions he made, we have cause for doubt.

Tanisha's Preparation for the Abortion

Tanisha recalled no one counseling her about alternatives. Tanisha did not see a doctor on August 2, the first day she went in. "They told me they had to bring a special doctor in. ... they told me I was too far along...I was 14 to 16 weeks."

She returned the next day. "I went to the desk and told them who I was, and they told me to have a seat. And I sat and I waited....And I had to fill out some more forms. ... and after that I was taken into the room, received two pills, a green pill and a white pill which were supposedly a Valium. ... I went and I was advised by the nurses to remove everything from the bottom down, and I laid on the table to wait on the doctor or whatever.

Tanisha's Abortion

Perry entered "when I was laying down on the table... He didn't say hi, he didn't greet me or anything...The conversation Dr. Perry and I had was when I -- during when he was performing the procedure. When I was screaming out because I was in pain, and he told me that he couldn't do anything because I was -- I was moving, because he couldn't do anything because I wouldn't stop moving. That's the conversation I remember Dr. Perry and I had."

Perry's deposition indicates he spoke with her while performing an ultrasound. "I told her that she was on the borderline of what we would do. I told her that there was public and private agencies elsewhere that would assist her if she wished to change her mind and asked her if she wished to change her mind about doing it. ... So, we're having this conversation, you know, this is the border, you know, you have been -- it has to be done now in Tennessee, if you don't want to change your mind, then we will have to send you to Atlanta. ... I told her this was the upper limits of what we could do with suction, that if we didn't do it, you know, is your mind made up today because, you know, we're not going to talk about doing it the next time we meet, you know, this is it."

Perry dismissed the effects of the pre-op Valium, "I think it's voodoo medicine because it doesn't have time to get in the bloodstream if we're not shooting IV in there to do much anyway. ... Patients seem to think it makes them feel better so we give it to everybody. ... People with fear do not absorb from the stomach."

So, by Perry's admission, the clinic was administering medications to patients, knowing that the medication would not take effect prior to the procedure.

He injected anesthetic in the cervix, but did not wait to see if the Valium had taken effect. He did not check her heart or lungs because, "If she had a medical history of heart problems or lung problems that I thought

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would interfere with this procedure, then I would have checked them. The only thing she listed that she had a problem with before was migraines."

Hello, Dr. Perry. Tanisha's medical history was filled out by her aunt's friend, who put "not sure about" on the forms. Did he read the medical history at all? Why did they proceed when they had an incomplete medical history for this underage patient?

Tanisha said she was moving during the procedure because of pain, and Perry "didn't explain to me, he said it in a really abusive and really mean way that he couldn't do anything if I didn't stop moving. He told me to stop moving, and the nurses were restraining me down. ...and I asked for them to stop and to give me something for pain, and no one gave me anything for pain."

When asked how far into the procedure this was, she responded, "It seemed like forever to me so I can't really say."

Tanisha's Injury

Perry said that the "patient vomited, retched, moved, grasped, and could not be accomplished on three tries. ... she moved suddenly on the table and it didn't feel right to me, I thought that thing had gone wrong. I didn't do anything else to her with suction. ... Tanisha makes a sudden move, and it felt to me like this thing went through the wall.... And I took the suction off, and I took it out, and I said I think we just perforated. ... I turned the ultrasound machine on. Got the tenaculum and went back in with the sound again starting from scratch, and I could see the cranium.... I didn't want to put suction in there and turn it on if it was going to be a perforation because I could take a relatively minor to moderate complication and turn it into a total catastrophe or a disaster.... So, I used under direct vision to take the forceps, and I was just getting right on it, like I say you know, to complete this procedure... Get that last fetal part that I could see on ultrasound. ...The cranium.... And she couldn't hold still. And so I gave her -- I started an IV and gave Stadol IV which is similar to Demerol I cleaned everything up, tried again, couldn't get her to cooperate."

He described trying unsuccessfully to grasp the cranium with forceps, saying, "we finally decided, she says, quit, you know, I can't take anymore, then to me that was time to go to the hospital and have general anesthesia."

Tanisha's Transfer

Tanisha said, "Then all I can remember was I was pushed in a wheelchair and put in the back seat of Lisa's car, and I was going to the hospital." Lisa was a clinic employee.

Tanisha did not recall them telling her why she was being brought to the hospital. "I just can't ever forget that day when I was in so much pain. ... I felt like somebody violated my body."

Tanisha's Mother

Tanisha's mother said the first she knew her daughter had been pregnant was when Cathy called her at work, and put her on the phone with clinic staff who told her to come and sign forms because Tanisha was having a procedure done. Cathy called again and Tanisha's mother realized that there was a problem, "and I was just an emotional wreck."

Tanisha's mother arranged for another sister to give her a ride to the hospital, where she "met a couple of nurses there that asked me to sign some forms. ...They had already taken her back and prepped -- was prepping her for surgery."

Lisa from the clinic sat beside her and gave her papers to sign, which she did because, "I was very upset. I was hysterical. Everybody was just talking to me at one time, papers here, papers there..." She was confused, "blinded with fear," and as of the time of her deposition still didn't know what the papers were.

Tanisha's mother saw Dr. Campbell "after the first surgery and [he] told me they had to take her back in. ...And I asked him is she going to die, and he in turn stated I'll do all I can."

Can you imagine what this mother was going through -- to go from not even knowing that her daughter was pregnant to being called to a hospital where doctors were fighting to save the girl's life.

"He told me that the abortion was not successful, that he had to remove some of the fetus, that the artery behind her bladder had ruptured, and she was hemorrhaging severely, and he was going to go in and try and

do what he could."

Her relationship with her sister Cathy suffered: "It's not where it was before the incident, but through a lot of prayer, praying, I put forth an effort and she has also to make our relationship a little better, but we're still distant in a sense."

Tanisha's Future

Tanisha described physical problems, including, "some scarring and abnormal cells," "abdominal cramps on my sides and... I would hurt when I used the bathroom." Tanisha suffered soreness from the surgery.

Tanisha expressed fear that she might not be able to bear children in the future. She said that the main reason for filing suit was "to prevent this from happening to anyone else." She said she had "flashbacks and nightmares" about the abortion, that she began to see a counselor and wanted psychological care. "I had difficulty getting over the loss of my child... I had difficulty getting over that and the fact that I was reliving the events that happened August the 3rd."

The Expert's Opinion, the Administrator's Qualifications

The affidavit of an expert witness found numerous faults with the consent document and process, and said that Perry never should have attempted to finish the procedure once he suspected a perforation, that the clinic "was not sufficiently qualified or trained to handle medical emergencies," that pain control was inadequate and Tanisha was not properly prepared for the pain she would suffer, that staff members Lisa Thomas and Deborah Walsh, director and assistant director at the time of the abortion, "apparently are not qualified in any medical fields or qualified in any surgical fields and have strictly been trained on the job."

Ms. Thomas stated that she had a bachelor's degree in history, economics, and geography, and that her uncompleted graduate studies were in "history with emphasis on the field of abortion." Her work experience prior to Volunteer was food service, photographing buildings for an historical survey, church secretary, and church organist. She had sought work specifically in an abortion clinic, and worked her way up from counselor to office manager to assistant director to director.

Tanisha's Reflections

Tanisha's deposition ends, "At that time I was a child.... I looked at them to take care of me in every way possible, and I don't feel as they had done that. ...I trusted them because they were professionals, and they were doctors and nurses, and I didn't think anything could go wrong." (*Knoxville News-Sentinel* 10-4-92; Knox County Circuit Court No. 3-268-92)

As for further evidence of what sort of facility Volunteer Medical Clinic is, the following deficiencies were noted in inspections (I've put the most alarming or disgusting in italics.):

- staff lavatories lacked proper wrist controls (12-18-80, 4-29-92)
- no documentation of physician hospital privileges (12-18-80, 3-26-90)
- *out-of-date medications* (6-6-84, 1-9-89)
- water damage on ceiling, water dripping from ceiling in office area (6-6-84)
- lab floor deteriorated (10-21-85)
- *medications for patient use stored with cleaning supplies* (10-21-85)
- *reused disposable curettes* (9-11-86)
- emergency lights failed test, absent, or inoperable (9-11-86, 2-18-88, 4-29-92, 4-7-93)
- (1-26-88)
- no written quality assurance plan (1-9-89)
- IV solution stored on supply room floor (3-26-90)
- *expired sterile instruments* (3-26-90)
- lacking policy on protection and retention of medical records (3-26-90)
- various fire code violations (10-21-85, 9-11-86, 2-18-88, 3-23-89, 3-29-90, 3-12-91, 4-29-92, 4-7-93, 4-18-94)
- no written policy on disposal of contaminated waste (3-5-91)
- ceilings, baseboard, and carpet need repair (4-29-92)
- dirty waiting room furniture and carpet (4-8-94)
- torn and deteriorated recovery room furniture covers (4-8-94)

- *improperly stored medications* (4-8-94)

(Statement of Deficiencies and Plan of Correction 12-18-80, 6-6-84, 10-21-85, 9-11-86, 1-26-88, 2-12-88, 1-9-89, 3-23-89, 3-26-90, 3-29-90, 3-5-91, 3-12-91, 4-29-92, 4-7-93, 4-8-94, 4-18-94)

Two employees were convicted in 1976 of selling abortions to non-pregnant women. (*Knoxville Journal* 3-10-89)

[Brenda Vise](#) died in 2002 after an abortion at Volunteer Medical Clinic.

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