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Mitchell Creinin, MD

Working Where He's Needed

When Dr. Mitch Creinin began looking at ob/gyn residency programs as a medical student, he was not planning on becoming an abortion provider per se. "Going into my residency, I knew I wanted abortion training, but I thought it was routine," he says. "I learned very quickly that there weren't that many programs offering abortion as part of a residency."

It was seeing the true scarcity of abortion services that solidified Dr. Creinin's decision to become a provider. "I went into medicine because I wanted to help people—not just make them feel better, but truly help them," he says. "When I did my family planning rotation (at the University of California San Francisco), I saw women who were truly in need and ignored by a significant population of the medical community. Meeting these women and providing them with abortions had a very strong impact on my choice for a career."

For the last five-and-a-half years, Dr. Creinin has served as the Director of Family Planning and Family Planning Research and in the Department of Obstetrics Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh/Magee Women's Hospital. "In San Francisco I was one of many providers, but in Pittsburgh there just aren't that many," he says. "Here I provide a much-needed service. We really are barely able to take care of the number of patients in this metropolitan area, not because there are so many patients but because there are so few providers."

When Dr. Creinin moved to Pittsburgh, abortion services were minimally available before seven weeks. Early abortion services are more widespread now, in large part due to Dr. Creinin's implementation of Manual Vacuum Aspiration and methotrexate (medication abortion) methods. "Making abortion available this early in pregnancy has had an amazing impact, because women want to get their abortions as early as possible," Dr. Creinin says. "Unlike what most legislators think, women are not dumb. They know what they want when it comes to their reproductive healthcare."

Dr. Creinin is frustrated by the fact that the major barrier to abortion services could be easily alleviated if more ob/gyns simply provided abortions themselves. "I wish women could just get abortions from their regular doctors," he says. "Women come to our clinic from three hours away; moreover, there are only three or four of us providers in Pittsburgh who handle private practice referrals."

However, he is aware of the difficulties that ob/gyns face. "Part of the reason that there aren't many new providers is that many practitioners, after training, don't feel impassioned enough to put in time at the clinic on top of their regular practice. It's a big commitment."

According to Dr. Creinin, making the decision to provide abortion services is no different than making the decision to provide other kinds of healthcare. Privacy is always the issue. "Physicians

need to be activists in that they need to insist that medical decisions be left between the woman and her doctor,” Dr. Creinin says. “Whether you’re a cardiologist or a family practitioner or an ob/gyn, you are obligated to educate your patients about their health choices—meaning keeping them informed of the risks and benefits of their options. This could be about whether to have bypass surgery or take hormone replacement therapy or yes, have an abortion. The government needs to stay out of the doctor’s office, and all physicians need to be activists when it comes to this issue, even if it’s just by joining PRCH to show their support.”

Dr. Creinin’s research office served as the initial test sight for Plan B, one of two marketed emergency contraceptive packages. Because of this, Pittsburgh is one of the most educated cities when it comes to emergency contraception (EC). “We provide information on EC to all of our patients, and I push really hard for advance prescription of emergency contraception.”

Dr. Creinin has blunt and inspiring advice for medical students and residents facing the decision to provide abortions: “Don’t let people beat down your passion, because it’s incredibly rewarding to follow what you feel passionate about. I believe that I help more patients in a day than some doctors do in their entire lives,” he says. “You know that old saying, ‘today is the first day of the rest of your life’? Abortion providers give women the opportunity to truly have that first day of the rest of their lives, and that’s amazing.”

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