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January 25

Opinion

The real abortion issue: Safety

By **John J. Sciarra**

JULY 12, 2013

Headlines on the abortion rights battle continue to feature lawsuits, political and ideological declarations and legislative hand grenades. The recent events in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Texas Legislature aimed at restricting abortions are just the latest example. Between these legal and political forays is a media wasteland that ought to be occupied by public health experts and health care professionals.

More than 40 years ago, I was one of 100 professors of obstetrics and gynecology who viewed termination of pregnancy as a public health issue. We signed a statement alerting our colleagues to prepare immediately for the effects of legalization of abortion, which we could see on the horizon. And in fact *Roe v. Wade* was decided just one year later.

“For the first time, doctors will be expected to do an operation simply because a patient asks that it be done,” we wrote in the April 1, 1972, issue of American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. “The best estimate for the first year (of legalized abortion) is 1 million, which amounts to one for every four births.”

This “increasingly liberal course of events,” we wrote, presented “an imminent problem of rather staggering proportions.” We were remarkably prescient about the number of abortion requests we would get. And we correctly predicted today’s abortion rate of one in four pregnancies.

But we were wrong about the resulting challenges. We thought it was going to be an issue of increasing capacity while keeping patients safe.

“Can we handle such a load?” we wrote then. “Yes, with careful planning, conscientious effort, and modern techniques.” If only half the nation’s 20,000 obstetricians did abortions, existing hospital facilities would be able to cope because “the requisite space will soon be freed by the lessened number of septic abortions and puerperal (post-abortion) cases.”

We had all seen the grim effects of criminalized, illegal abortion. As a young physician at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, I had watched helplessly as a college woman died of infection after a botched abortion attempt. Her family was stunned; she had told no one she was pregnant. Soon after, a married woman in her early 30s was brought in hemorrhaging and died from a similar attempt. I could not comfort her three children or her husband, who felt complicit in her death. These experiences haunt me still.

In those days, 20 American women died for every 100,000 live births, many from unsafe abortions. We knew that legalizing abortion could save many of those lives, and we were right: Today’s maternal mortality rate is half what it was then, because legal abortion is

safe and back-alley attempts are much rarer. We were optimistic that society would hail legalized abortion as a win for everyone.

We did not anticipate the backlash that has turned abortion into an ideological battleground. So I have again joined 99 of my fellow professors of obstetrics and gynecology in another statement on the issue, published earlier this year, in the very same American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

“We have had 40 years of medical progress but have witnessed political regression that the 100 professors did not anticipate,” we wrote. “Forty years later, the change is not liberal. Its effects will threaten, not improve, women’s health and already obstruct physicians’ evidence-based and patient-centered practices.”

As we recommended, doctors did learn to standardize outpatient procedures, use local rather than general anesthesia, and convert some treatment rooms into minor-surgery units. Sonograms, new contraceptives, antibiotics and blood replacement have also saved countless lives.

But waiting periods that can endanger women are now law in 26 states. In addition, “Laws in 27 states force physicians to provide deceptive counseling,” we wrote in 2013. “Many hospitals enforce fetal and maternal health restrictions that are not based in the law.” As one result, 90 percent of abortions are now done in private facilities, not hospitals. “In our view, hospitals have disregarded the responsibility that our academic predecessors expected them to assume.”

Rather than increasing contraceptive availability as we recommended in 1972, ideologues attack family planning and are making all reproductive health care less available to the poor.

Only two of us who signed the original statement are among the current 100; we are both retired and the others have mostly died. But none ever publicly repudiated that statement. And in the current one, 100 of us from medical schools in 39 states have reaffirmed the 1972 commitment to preserve women’s health: by teaching about all methods of contraception and abortion; providing evidence-based information to both patients and legislators; insisting that hospitals where we work admit abortion patients; and ensuring broad contraceptive availability to reduce the need for abortion.

No law that has ever been passed and no law that ever will be passed can prevent a

determined woman from trying to end an unwanted pregnancy. Society and hospitals must accept their role in keeping women safe in that process.

Dr. John J. Sciarra is professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

In case you missed it



Editorial: Chicago, city of shame and violence, where 3-year-old, 13-year-old are unintended targets

JUN. 21, 2020



Commentary: The real stories of the Chicago women who portrayed Aunt Jemima

JUN. 19, 2020



At least 106 people shot, 14 fatally, in Chicago weekend violence

JUN. 22, 2020

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Editorial: Chicago, city of shame and violence, where 3-year-old, 13-year-old are unintended targets

By **The Editorial Board**

JUNE 21, 2020, 1:38 PM

Every day with a homicide is a bad day. And every day Chicago loses a young person with promise and vitality, this city is shamed.

We've written those words twice previously — *twice* — in reflections after gunfire killed a child for no reason beyond the immutable pattern of violence in Chicago, which goes: From time to time, amid all the discharge of weaponry, a young innocent will get in the way of the bullets.

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Commentary: The real stories of the Chicago women who portrayed Aunt Jemima

By **John Mark Hansen**

JUNE 19, 2020, 5:49 PM

uaker Oats and its parent company

Q PepsiCo [conceded Wednesday](#) that the Aunt Jemima brand was based on a racial stereotype and announced that it will retire the trademark and rename its pancake mixes and syrups.

This is big news in Chicago, where Quaker Oats is based. Moreover, the character Aunt Jemima got her start in the city, represented in two World's Fairs by two Chicagoans, Nancy Green and Anna Robinson. The real stories of their lives paralleled the made-up stories of the life of Aunt Jemima.

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[News / Breaking News](#)

At least 106 people shot, 14 fatally, in Chicago weekend violence

By [Paige Fry](#), [Jeremy Gorner](#), [Jessica Villagomez](#)

JUNE 22, 2020, 6:06 PM

At least 106 people were shot in Chicago, 14 of them fatally, from midafternoon Friday through early Monday, according to authorities and Tribune data.

It is the most people shot in one weekend since at least 2012 but not the deadliest this year, [after more than 20 were killed over the last weekend in May](#), according to data compiled by the Tribune. Twelve of those shot this past weekend were younger than 18 years old. Five of those children died.

Six shootings involved three or more victims.

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News

Watch live: Gov. J.B. Pritzker gives a coronavirus update

AUGUST 17, 2020, 12:34 PM

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker discusses the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in a briefing scheduled for 1:30 p.m.

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Arts & Entertainment

After Twitter outcry, 5 women detail Chris D'Elia's alleged sexual improprieties

By [Amy Kaufman, Los Angeles Times](#)

JUNE 22, 2020, 5:31 AM

One morning in the fall of her senior year of high school, Julia Holtzman awoke to find that Chris D'Elia had sent her a direct message on Instagram.

The 17-year-old was confused. She was not a fan of the then-36-year-old stand-up comic, and was not following his page. But she saw that D'Elia had a verified social media account, and was intrigued. So she responded to him, asking how he'd found her.

"Just came across. Is that bad?????" he said in the November 2016 exchange.

"It was clear I was in high school.

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[News / Breaking News](#)

Neighbors outraged as toddler, 3 teens killed in weekend violence: 'This is a horrific Father's Day. This 3-year-old baby lost his life.'

By [Rosemary Sobol](#), [Paige Fry](#), [Jeremy Gorner](#), [Jessica Villagomez](#), [Morgan Greene](#)

JUNE 21, 2020, 8:04 PM

Neighbors congregated on a corner in the 600 block of North Central Avenue on Sunday afternoon to denounce the weekend's overnight violence, including the shooting death of 3-year-old Mekhi James.

"A line was crossed," said the Rev. Ira Acree of Greater St. John Bible Church. "This is a horrific Father's Day. This 3-year-old baby lost his life. ... I could not pastor this community and not say something."

Joined by other faith and community leaders, neighbors filled the sidewalk to remember and mourn the children killed.

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[Life & Style / Ask Amy](#)

Ask Amy: Young marriage faces old problems

By **Amy Dickinson**

JUNE 22, 2020, 5:00 AM

Dear Amy: I have been married for a year and a half. We got married super-quick without knowing each other well.

I am mostly happy. My husband treats me well and we have a baby on the way.

My complaint is that when we got married, he had a good-paying factory job that he had been at for three years.

Immediately after our marriage he got fired (for not showing up).

Since then, he has had 5 different jobs! He has quit or has gotten fired from all of them. He also does not seem to care if a job pays well.

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[Arts & Entertainment / Television](#)

'The Chi' recap: Season 3 returns, minus Jason Mitchell

By **William Lee, Nina Metz**

JUNE 21, 2020, 9:00 PM

Each week, William Lee and Nina Metz recap and discuss the third season of "The Chi," which airs at 8 p.m. Sundays on Showtime.

"The Chi" is back for a third season minus it's biggest star Jason Mitchell, who was **fired** due to allegations about concerning behavior off-camera with co-workers.

His character, Brandon, functioned as show's heart and soul — both as a father figure to Kevin and as a chef with big dreams and a food truck — and he was a vital part of the “The Chi's” layered portrait of Black life on Chicago's South Side.

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