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HEALTH

Some Doctors Rethink Careers After States Restrict Abortions

Doctors who perform abortions are considering their options after the Supreme Court's ruling leaves them unable to continue their work

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July 14, 2022 5:30 am ET

Giovannina Anthony is among doctors who have rethought their careers since the Supreme Court removed constitutional protections for abortion.

An obstetrician-gynecologist, Dr. Anthony has conducted medical abortions at her clinic in Jackson, Wyo., for 17 years. She was the only abortion provider in the state before telemedicine-based startup justthepill.com.

The Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24 has put her work in doubt. If Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, agrees that the decision now triggers a state law banning abortion except in cases of rape, incest or danger to the mother's life, it will be take effect within five days. Mr. Gordon is awaiting an analysis of the Supreme Court decision by Wyoming's attorney general, a spokesman for the governor said.

Dr. Anthony, 55, said she considered retiring early after the Supreme Court's decision. Instead, she decided to push to keep conducting abortions in Wyoming. If the trigger law takes effect, she and other doctors said they plan to file for a court injunction against it.

"I initially felt like I had no fight left in me. Now I'm feeling a little more in fight mode," she said. "I feel like I can make a difference. And for me, that's a reason to stay."



The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has changed the work of some doctors performing abortions and other healthcare workers involved in the procedures. In response, some of the doctors and workers are traveling to other states to practice temporarily or moving to states where abortion remains legal from states where it is now restricted. Others said they plan to stay in states curbing abortion to provide access in cases when it remains legal.

Catherine Romanos, a family doctor in Ohio, said she plans to make regular drives to Michigan to conduct abortions beginning this month. She is applying for a medical license in Michigan and Illinois, where abortion is legal. In Ohio, a law that recently took effect banned abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected. Dr. Romanos said she is turning away patients whose pregnancies have advanced past that stage and in some cases advising them to seek an abortion in other states.

“Everything is in flux,” she said.

After the Supreme Court ruling, abortions are largely unavailable in about a dozen states because of new bans or legal uncertainty. Another roughly half-dozen states could ban or restrict abortion soon. Demand for abortions has risen in states where abortion remains legal, doctors and abortion-rights advocates said.



Some states that allow abortion are recruiting healthcare workers from states restricting the procedure. The Boulder Valley Women's Health Center in Colorado has hired two medical assistants from Texas in recent months, said medical director Kelly Peters. The center needs more staff to handle an increase in prospective patients, Dr. Peters said.

"We had 12 phone calls within the first hour or two after the decision came down," she said.

Choices, an abortion clinic in Memphis, Tenn., said it is opening a second location three hours away in Carbondale, Ill., a state where providers have said they are conducting abortions for more patients traveling from states where the procedure is restricted.

Carafem, which operates clinics that perform abortions in Atlanta, Chicago, Nashville, Tenn., and Washington, D.C., said it has shifted a clinician from Tennessee to Illinois to handle higher demand from patients traveling from states where the procedure is restricted.

Carafem said it canceled about half the appointments at its Nashville clinic after the Supreme Court ruling because those patients' pregnancies had progressed past the six-week mark at which Tennessee law now bans abortion. Carafem provided those patients with information about clinics in neighboring states where they could get an abortion, said Carafem's chief operating officer Melissa Grant.

"What we're doing is really watching to see what the need will be because this is just starting," Ms. Grant said.



Some clinics said they plan to remain in states where abortion could be further restricted. Julie Burkhart worked for two years to open what would be the only clinic providing surgical abortions in Wyoming. Wellspring Health Access was close to opening in the city of Casper near the state's center in May when someone broke through a window and set fire to a container of gas in the exam and procedure area. Ms. Burkhart said she plans to rebuild the clinic, even if abortion is banned except for rare cases in Wyoming. She said she is also thinking of operating a mobile clinic to conduct abortions.

“Any place in America where we can save access to reproductive healthcare, we need to at least try,” she said.

Ms. Burkhart, president of Wellspring Health Access, is also part of a group that recently acquired the Hope Clinic, an abortion provider in southern Illinois. While she rebuilds the Wyoming clinic in the hopes that the trigger law isn't enacted or is blocked, she has also been working to get the Illinois clinic more resources to handle a surge in demand since the Supreme Court decision.

“There are so many phone calls coming in that we haven't been able to get to everyone, which is very disheartening,” said Ms. Burkhart. “We had been hiring more people. But now we need more folks.”



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