
Fertility doctor Morris Wortman, accused of using own sperm with patients, dies in plane crash

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A New York fertility specialist and OB-GYN who was embroiled in a fertility fraud scandal that saw him accused of using his own sperm to inseminate patients was killed in a plane crash Sunday.

Dr. Morris Wortman, 72, was a passenger in a homemade aircraft that apparently came apart in flight and crashed to the ground shortly before 5:45 p.m. in Orleans County, about an hour west of Rochester.

Wortman was a prominent Rochester doctor who first became the focus of news stories in the 1990s as an abortion provider often targeted by anti-abortion activists. In the past 18 months, Wortman has been accused of using his own sperm to inseminate women who came to him in the 1980s for fertility treatment – a practice often called "fertility fraud" in cases when the physician lies about the source of the sperm.

Officials: Doctor, pilot both killed

The plane – a fixed-wing, hand-built experimental aircraft – crashed in a pasture behind a house in the small town of Ridgeway, according to the sheriff's office. Aircraft parts were scattered around the area, according to WIVB television in Buffalo.

The pilot, 70-year-old Earl J. Luce Jr. of Brockport, also died in the crash, the Orleans County Sheriff's Office said.

A preliminary investigation showed that "the wings of the aircraft became detached from the fuselage and fell to the ground in an orchard," Orleans County Sheriff Christopher Bourke said in a news release. The fuselage of the aircraft continued west for another 1,000 to 1,500 yards before crashing.

Fertility fraud allegations sullied reputation

Wortman was the target of a lawsuit from Geneseo resident Morgan Hellquist, whose parents saw Wortman for fertility treatment. Hellquist was a gynecological patient of Wortman's when she learned via genetic databases that he was her genetic father, the lawsuit alleges.

She alleges medical malpractice in the lawsuit, saying Wortman knew he was her biological father but continued to see her as her OB-GYN. Wortman told her parents that the sperm donor was a medical student, the lawsuit alleges.

PREVIOUSLY: Brothers who suspect they are offspring of Morris Wortman's alleged fertility fraud, grapple with medical uncertainty

In some cases, according to claims against him, Wortman told patients that he was using the sperm of others; in other instances he allegedly said that he was mixing the sperm from a husband with other sperm to help boost fertility. In none of these cases did Wortman reveal he was using his own sperm, according to interviews with multiple adults who accused him by the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, part of the USA TODAY Network.

In New York, there is little in the laws that respond to fertility fraud and, despite the advocacy of the offspring of physicians who lied about fertility treatment, lawmakers have yet to approve proposed statutes that allow for criminal and civil penalties.

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