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OPINION

We're saving friends

Patients can't always be able to afford



Stephanie Goodell and Nisha Verma Opinion contributors

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If you saw us together today, you might assume we were longtime friends who met at college or work. Instead, we met just two years ago as a doctor and a patient in a hospital in Massachusetts. Neither of us could have predicted the circumstances under which we would meet, but the reality is that Americans across the country find themselves in similar situations every day: pregnant, and needing an abortion.

Now, as the Supreme Court prepares to hear oral arguments in *June Medical Services LLC v. Gee*, a case that could impact access to abortion across the United States, stories like ours are more important than ever — stories that show the complicated reality of obtaining an abortion amid new restrictions, as well as the fundamental love, support and friendship that underpin that important personal decision.

Desired pregnancy, necessary abortion

When we first met in 2018, one of us, Stephanie Goodell, had just been admitted to the labor and delivery unit after breaking water at 21.5 weeks; the other, Nisha Verma, was a fourth-year OB-GYN resident and part of the team of doctors providing care that day. We mourned together as *we came to terms with the fact that the baby would almost certainly not be able to survive outside the uterus so early in pregnancy.*

As we reviewed the options — inducing labor or moving forward with an abortion procedure — compassion was ever present. This was a long-awaited pregnancy, and the desire to hold the

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We spent many hours together during those long days in the hospital. Acts of love and compassion, both small and large, were constant — from round-the-clock bedside care, to the support of social workers and healers, to simple prayer flags hung in the room for comfort. We understood that recovery is about more than medical expertise, but also about the compassion we show people in their times of need.

During these days in the hospital, we bonded as a doctor and a patient, and also as two people who respected and appreciated each other. We shared stories from our past and our plans for the future. We talked about unpredictable circumstances and unimaginable trials: the difficulty of conceiving naturally, the sorrow of miscarriage. And for the loss we honored together, we shared this quiet prayer: “In your next life, you will go somewhere better.”

Doctor-patient bond is deep, personal

We have remained close in the years since our paths first crossed. One of us is now an OB-GYN who provides abortion care in Georgia, finding daily inspiration in the strength and resilience of patients. The other now works in the development office at the same hospital where this story began, motivated by the competence and compassion of the doctors who provided such extraordinary care during a difficult time.

This March, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the case of June Medical Services LLC v. Gee, a challenge to a Louisiana law requiring abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a local hospital. The court's decision could have major implications for abortion rights across the United States.

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and potentially life-saving option for people whose futures could depend on their doctors' ability to care for and advocate for them.

At the end of the day, we each have the same goals: We hope that someone will treat us with kindness and compassion in our times of greatest need, and we want to be able to care for others in their worst moments with that same kindness and compassion.

Our friendship is a testament to the power of the close relationships between doctors and their patients. We hope that the Supreme Court will remember that as the justices prepare to hear a case that could significantly impact abortion access across the country and change the ending of stories like this one.

Stephanie Goodell specializes in talent development at the same hospital where her caregivers saved her life and has shared her story in an amicus brief submitted in the June Medical Services LLC v. Gee case. Dr. Nisha Verma completed her OB-GYN residency in Massachusetts and now works as an OB-GYN who provides abortion care in Georgia.

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