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CHICAGO Sunday Sun-Times

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12 dead after abortions in state's walk-in clinics

By Pamela Zekman
and Pamela Warrick

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At least 12 women have died following legal abortions in Illinois walk-in abortion clinics.

Although state health officials knew of not a single clinic death just a week ago, The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn. have learned of a dozen women who suffered fatal infections or bled to death after undergoing abortion procedures in state-regulated clinics:

- Evelyn Dudley, 38, of Benton Harbor, Mich. She died of a hemorrhage on March 16, 1973, after an abortion at the now-defunct Friendship Medical Center, 850 W. 103rd St.
- Julia Rogers, 20, of Gary, Ind. She died March 28, 1973, also from a hemorrhage, a week after her Friendship abortion.
- Dorothy Muzarow, a registered nurse who, federal sources say, apparently underwent two incomplete abortions at the Women's Aid clinic in Lincolnwood. She died of a hemorrhage on Aug. 23, 1974.
- Linda Fondeen, who died Jan. 20, 1974, of a massive internal infection after an abortion at Pre-Birth Inc. The clinic has since gone out of business.
- Dorothy Brown, who bled to death on Aug. 16, 1974, after an abortion at the Friendship clinic.
- Another woman, known to federal health authorities only as Ms. Floyd, who died March 28, 1975, three days after her abortion at the Associated Concern clinic. The clinic was



THE ABORTION PROFITEERS

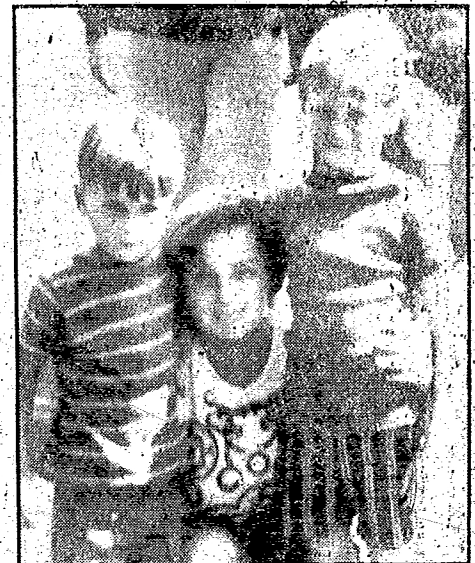
'If we had to empty the [vacuum] bottles after each patient, we'd only be able to do 20 [abortions] a day.'

closed down July 1 of that year by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

- Sandra Lynn Chmiel, a 35-year-old mother of four from the suburbs, who died of massive bleeding from a punctured uterus on June 3, 1975, just hours after her abortion at Biogenetics Ltd., 520 N. Michigan. According to testimony at a coroner's inquest, Chmiel was over 12 weeks pregnant when a Biogenetics doctor agreed to perform her abortion for \$600. The clinic has insisted its doctor only "repaired" the damage the woman did by trying to abort herself, but the clinic settled the case for \$75,000 a few weeks ago.
- Another woman identified by federal sources died in 1975 of a blood clot five days after an abortion in a Springfield clinic. Federal health officers believe the death was "probably not preventable."

• Yet another woman known to federal authorities died of

Turn to Page 10



SANDRA LYNN CHMIEL, 35-year-old mother of four, died of massive bleeding June 3, 1975, after her abortion at Biogenetics Ltd. She is shown with two of her children.

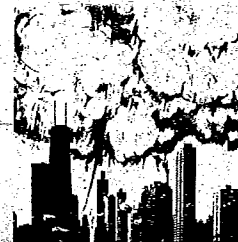
An adoptee who beat the system

Becky Bright's search for her roots. Page 5



If the bomb fell on the Loop...

Imagine the worst happened here. Views



More city inspectors face charges

100 U.S. indictments are expected. Page 3

BOWL LINEUP:
Details in Sports

Penn St. Alabama/Georgia
Sugar

Oklahoma Nebraska
Orange

Notre Dame Houston
Cotton

12 die after abortions at walk-in clinics

Continued from Page 1

a rare inflammation of the heart in 1975, three days after an abortion at a Champaign clinic.

- Diane Smith, whose death Sept. 11, 1976, is still under investigation by federal officials. She apparently told doctors at the hospital where she died she had just undergone an abortion at a Chicago area clinic.

- A woman state public health authorities are still trying to identify who died in 1977 of a perforated uterus following an abortion in a Granite City (Ill.) clinic.

In addition to these, is the death of Sherry Emry. She died Jan. 2, 1978, of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy which, an Indiana coroner ruled, resulted from an incomplete abortion at the Water Tower Reproductive Center Ltd., 840 N. Michigan.

AS A RESULT OF INFORMATION turned over to the Cook County state's attorney office by The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn., State's Atty. Bernard Carey has reopened the investigation of Emry's death. And members of her family have filed a \$5 million lawsuit against the Water Tower clinic for medical malpractice.

The Water Tower clinic is owned by Dr. Arnold Bickham, named in The Sun-Times as one of the city's biggest abortion profiteers. He was working at the Friendship clinic when at least three Friendship patients died.

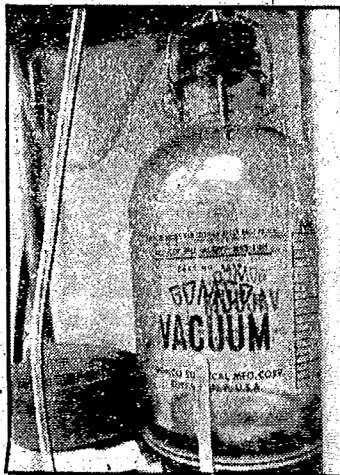
It is not known whether Bickham, who sells the cheapest abortions in Chicago, personally performed Emry's abortion.

But, had it not been for the corners he cuts in health care at his clinic, Sherry Emry might be alive today.

A five-month investigation of the city's abortion trade by The Sun-Times and Better Government Assn., discovered women may pay dearly for Bickham's discounts.

AT HIS WATER TOWER Reproductive Center Ltd., 840 N. Michigan, our undercover investigator documented how Bickham saves money on laboratory fees by tossing the tissue out when the law says it must be sent to pathologists for analysis.

That economy alone could be saving Bick-



AT LEAST one Michigan Avenue abortion mill, Water Tower Reproductive Center, doesn't empty after each patient's abortion bottles containing aborted tissue, meaning there can be no accurate laboratory test to determine whether the fetus was removed. Others, such as the Chicago Loop Mediclinic, handle specimens so carelessly that at least one patient had pathology reports with opposite findings.

ham as much as \$50,000 a year.

It may have cost Sherry Emry her life. Working inside the Water Tower clinic seven months after Emry's death, BGA investigator Mindy Trossman did not see any aborted tissue sent to pathologists.

If pathologists find no fetal parts, or other signs of pregnancy in the tissue sample, the doctor must conclude one of three things:

- The patient was not pregnant in the first place, and has undergone an unnecessary operation.

Seventh in a series

- The abortion was incomplete and fetal parts are beginning to rot in the patient's womb.

- The patient is suffering a life-threatening ectopic pregnancy.

An ectopic pregnancy, which occurs when the embryo implants itself in the Fallopian tubes instead of the womb, can be fatal if undetected. As the embryo grows, it bursts the tube and fills the woman's abdominal area with blood.

Victims of such abnormal pregnancies can quickly bleed to death.

Our investigator got her first hint that there were no pathological reports being done for patients of the Water Tower clinic when, working as a medical assistant, she was told by her supervisor to empty operating-room bottles full of "products of conception" from several patients.

The supervisor explained:

"If we had to empty the bottles after each patient, we'd only be able to do 20 [abortions] a day."

AS IT IS, THE CLINIC does two to three times that many abortions in a day. Trossman saw one aide wrap up a mass of bloody, aborted tissue and throw it in a trash can.

"Bickham wants us to take the bottles to the washroom to dump it, but you get too busy to do that," said the aide. "I just throw it in the garbage."

The aide later was reprimanded by the supervisor. "It starts to smell if you leave it in the garbage in the sterilization room," she said. "Throw it down the toilet."

"Bickham says we pay \$10,000 a month rent here so the toilets should be able to handle it. If they get clogged, the building should take care of it."

It was at Bickham's Water Tower clinic that Sherry Emry went for her abortion.

According to Lake County (Indiana) Coroner Albert Willard Jr., Emry died of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy resulting from her incomplete abortion at the Water Tower clinic.

The story of her death was pieced together by The Sun-Times and BGA and the findings were turned over to Carey's office.

She was only 26 years old when she died. A strong individual, said the coroner, the way she endured the pain of those last days.

SHE ALWAYS WAS A STRONG person, said her mother. And independent. She ran her own business—a leather-crafts shop in Hammond, Ind.

Separated from her husband, Sherry was making it alone. For the first time in five years, her business was in the black. Her divorce was nearly final; 1978 would be her year.

But in the last weeks of 1977, Sherry found out she was pregnant.

She thought she knew what she had to do. Abortion, she confided to a friend, was her only option.

She picked up a copy of the Chicago Reader and scanned the ads. It didn't take long for her to settle on an abortion clinic. Water Tower Reproductive—it had one of the biggest ads on the page.

With the Water Tower name and the Michigan Av. address, it sounded classy. Certainly, it would be safe. Still, she was scared.

On the morning of Dec. 28, Sherry Emry went to the Water Tower clinic and had what seemed to be a routine abortion—at least, it was what doctors would call "uneventful."

SHE WAS BACK AT A friend's Chicago apartment in time to catch the noon news.

Three days later, the pain started. The clinic had given her its standard sheet of instructions for postoperative care. Yes, it said, expect some cramps.

It's OK, she told her friends. Just cramps; maybe a touch of flu. It was New Year's Eve but she went to bed early.

By Jan. 2, Sherry couldn't get out of bed.

Turn to Page 44

12 die after legal abortions at walk-in clinics

Continued from Page 10

Fridnds took turns sitting with her, trying to persuade her to see a doctor. No, she said, it was probably just flu. She'd feel better.

But she slept fitfully. Sweating one minute, shivering the next. Her knees ached, her stomach ached, every part of her hurt. And she was so pale—deathly pale, one might say.

On that second day of 1978, Sherry died, probably during the afternoon because when they found Sherry in her bed after dark, the body was already cold and stiff.

Sherry Emry's life was, in the words of the Indiana coroner, "salvageable." She *should* still be alive today, he says. But because of an incomplete abortion at the Water Tower clinic, ruled Willard, she is dead.

HAD EMRY'S DOCTOR at the Water Tower clinic carefully examined her and had he received a reliable lab report on the tissue removed during her abortion, "the chance is very slim" that Emry's ectopic condition would have been missed, Willard said.

To find out how a healthy woman like Sherry Emry could die of an ectopic pregnancy just days after seeing a doctor, the Indiana coroner subpoenaed the clinic's records on Emry.

Bickham ignored the subpoenas and is now fighting new subpoenas for those and other patient records issued by the Cook County state's attorney.

What the Indiana coroner wants to know is whether Bickham's clinic discovered Emry's life-threatening condition, and if not, why not.

"That's all I ever wanted," said Emry's mother, Cleo Higginson. "I just can't believe all these things I have been reading in The Sun-Times can go on, and on and no one knows about it."

"Why didn't they know before? Why did I have to lose a daughter?"



SHERRY EMRY

According to our investigations, the Chicago Loop Mediclinic at 316 N. Michigan and the Biogenetics Ltd. clinic at 520 N. Michigan usually don't trash tissue samples from their abortions.

But we found that the Loop Mediclinic handles specimens so carelessly that the reports it gets back may be meaningless.

And neither the Mediclinic nor Biogenetics can be depended upon to share the findings of pathological reports with its patients, even when the reports may call for emergency medical attention.

In addition, the laboratory the clinics use—La Salle Scientific Laboratories Ltd., 914 W. Diversey—may be issuing dangerously unreliable reports, according to expert pathologists consulted during our investigation.

WHILE WORKING UNDERCOVER filing pathology reports at the Loop Mediclinic, BGA investigator Julia Rockler discovered two La Salle Laboratories reports with opposite findings for the same Mediclinic abortion patient.

One says fetal parts were found in the tissue sample, indicating that the patient was definitely pregnant. The other says no signs of pregnancy were detected. The patient was either not pregnant or the doctor left the fetus inside.

Daniel Millman, owner of La Salle Laboratories, said if clinics don't properly label the containers as products of the same abortion, the lab may mistakenly issue two reports. And those reports could give opposite results, because one container may have all the evidence of pregnancy while the other may contain only blood.

But, according to the clinic file on the public aid patient with the conflicting reports, tissue from her abortion never even got to the lab. Scrawled at the bottom of the file is: "Specimen accidentally thrown away by Linda."

Any number of La Salle reports on Mediclinic and Biogenetics patients claimed pathologists had identified with the naked eye conclusive signs of pregnancy.

"A microscopic exam is essential," said Dr. Raul B. Szanto,

Sherry Emry's life, the coroner said, was 'salvageable.' She should be alive today.



Chicago's dean of pathology and director of Cook County Hospital's pathology division. "Even with a microscope, it happens over and over again that we cannot see [the true signs of pregnancy]."

DR. WILLARD CATES JR., WHO oversees abortion surveillance for the National Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, believes pathological reports are so important that no clinic should allow a patient to leave the premises without one.

"You can't let a woman walk out of an abortion clinic without an immediate review of the specimen," Cates said.

Without that lab analysis, he said, "You can't be certain that the woman was pregnant, or that you got all the fetal remains, or whether she had an ectopic pregnancy."

In a survey of almost 200 patients at the Mediclinic, BGA investigator Rockler found that, with few exceptions, public aid patients got microscopic exams. Cash patients did not.

The laboratory bills Medicaid separately for tests on welfare patients. Millman said Illinois Department of Public Aid requires microscopic exams.

Last year, La Salle billed Medicaid for \$735,000 worth of work. By July of this year, the laboratory already had billed Medicaid another \$597,000. That makes La Salle one of the top three laboratories on the state's Medicaid payment list.

The lab's use of preprinted reports also disturbed Szanto, who inspects hospitals for the College of American Pathology. On such forms, the findings of tissue analysis are pre-printed and blanks are left only for pathologists to fill in dimensions of blood clots removed.

But Rockler found dozens of La Salle reports on which a pathologist, Dr. Arnold Mass, had not even filled in the blanks.

MILLMAN SAID MASS HAD ONLY substituted for a vacationing pathologist and had not followed lab policy.

"That's our fault," Millman conceded after reviewing some of the reports. "The work [analysis] was definitely done, it just wasn't done as professionally as it should have been."

Millman said the lab does accurate tests and does not issue phony reports.

That is disputed by James Trainor, former head of the Illinois Department of Public Aid. After leaving his state office, Trainor accepted an offer to become a director of La Salle.

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GOLDBLATT'S
State Street Store—7th Floor

Labs, but lasted only four days because he felt the lab was not operating properly.

But even on occasions when clinics do get "reasonable results" from the lab, doctors at both Biogenetics and the Loop Mediclinic may ignore them.

In July, for instance, the Loop Mediclinic received a report from the laboratory indicating an abortion on a 25-year-old rape victim was either incomplete or unnecessary.

The pathologist reported finding no signs of pregnancy in the tissue removed during the abortion but the patient said the clinic never told her this.

IN AUGUST, "MY OWN DOCTOR told me I was still pregnant. He said I was three months pregnant. I couldn't believe it," the woman said. "He told me to go back to the clinic that did the abortion."

She returned to the Loop Mediclinic, where she said the doctor who had performed her abortion told her that the pathology report indicated that the first abortion was complete.

But a copy of the pathology report seen by our investigator showed the doctor had not removed the products of conception. The clinic doctor went on to explain to his confused patient that once in a while "we get a missed abortion."

"The doctor said I was the one in a thousand," the patient recalled.

Our medical experts said they would not tolerate such delays. A pathological report that shows no evidence of pregnancy must be treated as a medical emergency, our experts say. The patient must be tracked down.

As Dr. Wendy Recant, director of surgical pathology at Michael Reese Hospital, put it: "This patient must be watched because in all likelihood she has an ectopic pregnancy."

"It would be the grossest kind of malpractice to miss one ectopic pregnancy and one woman went home and bled to death."

Sherry Emry did.

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A note to our readers

Reliable abortion counseling should be obtainable from family physicians. Other organizations that are prepared to respond to women's health questions are:

- Planned Parenthood Assn., 55 E. Jackson, 322-1240.
- Health Evaluation Referral Service, 2757 N. Seminary, 248-0169.
- The Women's Switchboard of the Midwest Women's Center, 800-972-5401.