SHAPING THE GOSNELL DEBATE

Why was it allowed to happen?

By **JACKIE JARDINE**

FOLLOWING the gruesome discovery of late-abortion remains, severed limbs in jars as twisted trophies of his craft and the carnage of infectious conditions at the Women's Medical Society clinic in West Philadelphia, the arraignment of Dr. Kermit Gosnell and his ill-trained staff begot a thunderous storm of controversy.

Pro-lifers pointed fingers at leftist feminists for trying to tread the thin line between the termination of a fetus and the murder of a viable baby after 24 weeks of gestation. The pro-choice movement argues that if the pro-life crusade didn't hold government funding hostage, safe, affordable options to women would be made more readily available.

But the truth of the matter is that Gosnell, a licensed family practitioner without training in obstetrics or gynecology, played both sides of the issue to his financial gain. Operating as a "women's health clinic" allowed him and his staff a cover to support a woman's choice to terminate a pregnancy. But he misled patients about the gestation terms, and neglected the sanitation and the ethical care due the women.

His actions, particularly against poverty-stricken, at-risk black and immigrant women, are metaphorically equivalent to bombing an abortion clinic.

But Gosnell's weapon of choice was his ability to exploit his patients. And in doing so, he politically discredited all of this nation's abortion clinics — whether they deserve it or not. And his skill in manipulating both sides of the pro-life/pro-choice debate put him at a politically neutral safe distance from the issue.

Surely he won't be forgotten for the gory conditions he facilitated and the horrid image of delivering a live child in one hand, and severing the spinal cord with a pair of dirty scissors in the other.

But his status in the abortion debate acts as a stumbling block to both sides. He is championed by the pro-life movement as representing the inevitable descent of a legal but morally objectionable activity, as they liken all abortion to murder.

HOWEVER, HE IS also the poster child for pro-choicers as the reason to demand affordable, reliable and readily available options for women wishing to terminate pregnancies that the conservative right would deny.

He is the anomaly in the political divide that deftly plays both sides.

But what if we were to remove the word "abortion" from the argument?

Legally speaking, this "clinic" was without proper licensing or trained staff. The premises was more akin to a medieval torture chamber or a slaughterhouse than an abortion clinic. These "terminations" shouldn't widen the divide in the life vs. choice debate because they were, in reality, without a proper medical, legal or political foundation. This was murder.

The real issue is just how these deplorable conditions, unethical and inhumane business practices, the lack of licensing and a properly trained staff could go unnoticed, ignored or overlooked by the state for so long. It is estimated that the Women's Medical Society took in as much as $15,000 a day with hundreds of violations, destroyed records, expired medications, missing lab work, and a woefully horrific display of gore on walls, floors, shelves and equipment.

This is not the time for pro-life or pro-choice posturing. It's the time to question the state Department of Health, Department of State, the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs and a plethora of state regulators.

How did so many agencies and the agents responsible for the public's health and well-being, spectacularly fail these women for 30 years?

How did the Women's Medical Society continue to operate with an estimated 46 complaints filed against Kermit Gosnell?

According to 2009 abortion statistics gathered by the state Health Department, "As of Dec. 31. 2009, there were 95 facilities in the commonwealth registered with the Department of Health to perform abortions, as required by the Abortion Control Act."

To this, we citizens and taxpayers must ask: But who is watching the unregistered, unlicensed, untrained and unsanitary facilities? ★



Associated Press

Warring factions: Pro-lifers & pro-choicers demonstrating.

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Too many i

By **CAROL E. TRACY & SUS**

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attorney for the Women's Law Proje