



Perspectives

The deVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research

April 2008

Research and Scholarship for an Informed Social Response to Human Life Questions

What Abortion Doctors Aren't Telling Patients

Patient Patronized Instead of Informed

Marlene* had just started college last fall when she was taken to the local emergency department feeling woozy and tired. Her friends had insisted that she see a physician when Marlene fainted during lunch. Was this just freshman jitters or a particularly nasty hangover? Actually Marlene was experiencing complications from a routine day surgery performed on over 100,000 Canadian women every year – an induced abortion.

As the surgery had gone according to routine, the subsequent problems relating to endometritis and bleeding came as a surprise to Marlene. When she had been given a consent form to sign at the abortion clinic that outlined the complications of an induced abortion Marlene was told by the nurse that she only needed to sign the document, not understand it. Marlene did not know, and was effectively told she did not need to know, that her abortion came with many risks.

Marlene's case is an all too familiar story for **Dr. Deborah Zeni** a family doctor in Georgetown, Ontario. Dr. Zeni is one of the researchers who reviews and analyzes the latest research on the effects of abortion on a woman's health. In a public lecture at the University of Toronto, sponsored by the Institute last fall, Dr. Zeni reported on some of the more recent studies. The findings are alarming.

In the case of Marlene, the risk of infection following an induced abortion was not delineated, nor was the importance of taking the prophylactic antibiotics that were prescribed. Marlene did not take antibiotics and an infection developed which landed her in hospital.

It is estimated that up to 8% of the 100,000+ induced abortions performed in Canada are complicated by pelvic infection.¹ Many of these infections are undetected. Nonetheless these infections lead to later problems of infertility, ectopic pregnancies and

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"One European study found that 8% of women who had an induced abortion suffered from a pelvic infection. In Canada, 100,000 women a year have abortions. It appears few of them are told about the risk of a pelvic infection."



Dr. Deborah Zeni M.D.C.C.F.P is a family physician who specializes in Obstetrics and Pediatrics. She won the 2006 Mentorship Award for the Ontario Rural Medicine Program, and the 2004 Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons Award for Excellence in Community Medicine. Dr. Zeni is a board member for the Institute, and a contributor to the book *Women's Health After Abortion; The Medical and Psychological Evidence*.

What Abortion Clinics Told Me

A Teenager Investigates Abortion



Daniela Melo, high school co-op student (right) and Elaine Zettel, Executive Director

Daniela Melo is an eighteen year old student doing a co-op placement at the Institute. She researched the common questions asked by young women at abortion clinics. Here is what she found.

As a high school student, what would happen if I became pregnant? I would be afraid or confused about to what to do next. If I considered abortion, I would turn to abortion clinics for information.

On abortion clinic websites I found some of the most frequently asked questions:

- Will it hurt?
- What are the possible side-effects?
- Is it safe?
- Will it affect future pregnancies?

The answers given were all very brief and similar: there is no pain except minor discomfort, there are no serious or long-lasting side effects, it will not affect future pregnancies, etc. When discussing the possible side-effects, none of the websites address the effect an abortion might have on my mental health and emotional well-being.

When I called two local abortion clinics, I was told I should make my decision before asking for any information, and they referred me to their website for answers. I was told that I could seek counselling, but was not directed to counselling services. From neither phone nor website did I learn any alternatives to abortion.

This lack of information from abortion clinics leaves me with even more questions than I had before.

What Abortion Doctors Aren't Telling Patients

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pre-term deliveries.² In fact, one previous induced abortion carries the same risk as smoking two packs of cigarettes a day, or being anorexic while pregnant.³ Though women are warned by advertisements at bus stops and on subways not to smoke during pregnancy there are no publicized warnings of induced abortions leading to premature babies who may then develop cerebral palsy.

In light of Marlene's case, Dr. Zeni discussed the issue of Informed Consent as one of the cornerstones of ethical medical practice today. Anyone who has visited a hospital or clinic to have their wisdom teeth pulled or their appendix removed has had to sign a consent form listing every possible side effect of the procedure. What will the side effects be? What should I expect during recovery? Why do I need to take medication after the procedure?

For Marlene, the answers to these questions came much too late. Having signed a form without understanding the risks, and having been told that she didn't need to know them, Marlene only realized what it would cost her after her abortion was done. Did Marlene really make an informed decision to have an abortion? Would she have decided differently if she were given informed consent? At the deVeber Institute, committed physicians like Dr. Deborah Zeni are working to get more information to the people that need it. The women in your community deserve to know the health risks of abortion.

*Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

1. Moreau C, Kaminski M, Ance PY, Bouyer J, Escande B, Thiriez G, Boulot P, Fresson J, Arnaud C, Subtil D, Marpeau L, Roze JC, Maillard F, Larroque B, EPIPAGE Group. Previous induced abortions and the risk of very preterm delivery: results of the EPIPAGE study. BJOG: an International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 2005 April;112:430-437.
2. Moreau et al.
3. Ance PY, Saurel-Cubizolles MJ, Di Renzo GC, Papiernik E, Breart G. Very and Moderate Preterm Births: Are the Risk Factors Different?. British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 1999 November; 108: 1162-1170.

Conference Notice

Dr. Deborah Zeni keynote speaker

The Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute is hosting a conference entitled "The Vocation of the Catholic Physician: Integrating the Practical, the Bioethical, and the Spiritual."

Dr. Deborah Zeni, board member of the Institute, is a keynote speaker. She will discuss Reproductive Choice: Abortion and True Informed Consent. The conference will be held on April 25-27, 2008 at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto. For more information or to register, call 416-926-2335.



Crucial Missing Information in University Education

Students Asking, What About Issues that Matter?

At today's universities, it is possible to study just about anything. Anything, that is, except the most important issues of our day.

As anyone who has had experience on a university campus lately knows, approaching bioethical issues with a perspective that values life is extremely difficult. Thanks to our donors, young people are having the opportunity to work with accomplished doctors, professors and researchers who also value life. Students are learning more about topics often left untouched

due to lack of funding and support in the mainstream. By providing that support to the Institute, you, the donors, are making this research possible.

Recently, two members of the Institute gave lectures based on their research and experience, to a forum of pro-life medical students. Dr. Paul Ranalli and Dr. Deborah Zeni inspired young physicians to find the facts that support their work for human life. We are grateful to Dr. Will Johnston and Barbara McAdorey for organizing this opportunity, and to deVeber Institute

donors who supported us to film these talks.

Now, medical students are joining with the Institute to study abortion's effect on women's health, and the barriers to success that face young single mothers in Canada.

Thanks to popular current movies such as Juno, Bella and Knocked Up, the joys and trials of unexpected pregnancy have been receiving more airtime. The realities of pregnancy for young women deserve more attention. Drawing from our past work **Going it Alone: Unplanned Single Motherhood in Canada**, we will be examining how medical professionals, educational institutions, and social service agencies are responding to young pregnant women. Medical students will help to develop this research, and to create tools for health care professionals and educators responding to unplanned pregnancies. We look forward to welcoming students in other fields with a strong life perspective to join our research efforts.

"When presented with deVeber research, I saw fellow students change their minds about abortion before my very eyes"

Elaine Zettel, a recent graduate of McMaster University and our current Executive Director, came to deVeber because of the crucial missing element to education that deVeber fills. "When presented with deVeber research, I saw fellow students change their minds about abortion before my very eyes." Elaine says. "The deVeber Institute has a very important role to play in informing the debate on life issues, providing information which is missing in the usual university curriculum." Thanks to continued help from our donors, we are honoured to keep filling that role.



Thanks to your support

We are able to uncover critical new studies about abortion and euthanasia, and deliver the information to those who need it. For example, in the past year, we have:

- undertaken new research projects
- hired 2 part-time staff
- moved to a more efficient office space
- published newsletters more frequently
- updated research and analysis for Women's Health After Abortion, third edition
- spoken to many student and community groups about today's life issues
- created new ways to disseminate information, including our first DVD and development of our website.

Look for more DVDs and an improved website soon! Our success depends on you.

Donor Appreciation:

Donors Give Generously

We are grateful to the following donors for their generous contributions.

The Jackman Foundation

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You help to make our research possible.

Thank you.

Why I support the Institute:

"The Institute does astonishingly good research work on a shoestring budget. What they have to say about bioethical issues deserves attention."

Mrs. June Smith

The Rupert and Timothy Smith Foundation

The deVeber Institute 25th anniversary DVD



Women's Health at Risk: Abortion and Informed Consent

Dr. Deborah Zeni M.D.C.C.F.P

- Gives Expert Analysis
- Explores New Research
- Speaks from the Heart

Contact the deVeber Institute to order your copy today.

Cost: \$20 + shipping

Call 416-256-0555 or Email bioethics@deveber.org

305 Jane Street, Toronto ON M6S 3Z3

A round of applause for...

This spring, we give special recognition to **The Second Hand Rose Shoppe** in Walkerton, Ontario. After paying for the filming and editing of our new DVD, they committed to a monthly donation of \$250 toward the Executive Director's salary. Thanks to their generosity, Elaine Zettel can focus her time and energy more on research-related work. It reduces our overhead costs, and allows your donations to be directed toward research and communication. **Thank you very much Second Hand Rose Shoppe for your ongoing support.**

We are grateful to Philip Sung Design Associates Inc for taking on the deVeber Institute as their non-profit beneficiary. It is thanks to them that we are able to continue improving our graphic design, including the layout and look of this newsletter.

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