



REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS & HEALTH

THE PATIENT SHOULD COME FIRST: REFUSALS TO PROVIDE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

Across the nation, health care providers are refusing – based on their own religious and personal beliefs – to treat patients seeking reproductive health care. Because of religion, some hospitals have turned away women seeking abortion or information about abortion, even when the woman's life is in jeopardy. In some instances, hospitals have refused to treat a woman whose miscarriage is threatening her life. These practices put religious beliefs over patients' needs and they can – and have – resulted in infertility, infection, and even death.

- A patient in an urban northeastern Catholic hospital experiencing a miscarriage nearly died because of the hospital's refusal to treat her. The patient's physician recalled that the "woman [wa]s dying before our eyes."¹
- A woman experiencing pregnancy loss was denied care for 10 days at a Catholic hospital outside Chicago, Illinois. She had a fever of 106 degrees and was dying of sepsis when she was transferred to a hospital that would treat her. The treating physician said the woman suffered "an acute kidney injury requiring dialysis and a cognitive injury due to the severity of her sepsis," spent nearly two weeks in the hospital, and then had to be transferred to a long-term care facility.²
- A patient hemorrhaging due to pregnancy complications went to the emergency room of a Catholic hospital in a western urban area. The emergency room physician would not provide the care she needed, even though the patient was actively bleeding and unstable. Ultimately, at great risk to her health, the patient was transferred in an unstable condition to another facility that was willing to perform the medical procedure she needed.³
- A patient who was 14 weeks pregnant came into a Catholic-owned hospital in the Midwest with ruptured membranes. It was clear to her physician that the patient needed an abortion because miscarriage was inevitable and her health was in danger. But because the fetus still had a heartbeat, the hospital ethics committee refused to approve the procedure. The patient had to be sent by ambulance 90 miles away to the closest institution that would treat her.⁴
- Jennafer Morris, a patient in Arkansas, endured a number of dangerous pregnancy complications and could not risk becoming pregnant again. She requested a tubal ligation (sterilization procedure) at the time of her Cesarean delivery, but her Catholic hospital provider refused to give her the procedure,⁵ even though it presents fewer risks, and is more cost-effective than delaying the procedure to a later time.⁶
- Tamesha Means was sent home by a Catholic hospital with two Tylenol after her water broke at 18 weeks of pregnancy, and the hospital did not give her full information about her condition and the treatment options. She returned to the hospital twice more in the following days, bleeding and in severe pain, but was not treated. The hospital only provided care when Tamesha began to deliver.⁷

A health care provider's religious beliefs should never determine the care a patient receives.



- 1 The physician was finally allowed to evacuate the pregnancy only when the fetal heartbeat had stopped. Lori R. Freedman, Uta Landy, & Jody Steinauer, *When There's a Heartbeat: Miscarriage Management in Catholic-Owned Hospitals*, 98 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1774, 1777 (2008); available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2636458/pdf/1774.pdf>.
- 2 ACLU AND MERGERWATCH, HEALTH CARE DENIED 12 (May 2016), available at https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/healthcaredenied.pdf.
- 3 Lori R. Freedman et al., *supra* n. i, at 1776-77.
- 4 Lori R. Freedman et al., *supra* n. i, at 1776.
- 5 ACLU AND MERGERWATCH, HEALTH CARE DENIED, *supra* n. ii, at 19-20.
- 6 Nikki Zite, Sara Wuellner & Melissa Gilliam, *Failure to Obtain Desired Postpartum Sterilization: Risk and Predictors*, 105 OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY 794 (2005), available at http://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Fulltext/2005/04000/Failure_to_Obtain_Desired_Postpartum.18.aspx.
- 7 ACLU AND MERGERWATCH, HEALTH CARE DENIED, *supra* n. ii, at 9-10.

