

On the Frontline

Category: Abortion

written by Andrea Eisenberg | June 11, 2019

There are those who speak heatedly about abortion, either for or against, from a distance, their voice hypothetical. There are those who sit with a woman, listen to her story, see her broken heart revealed and hold her hand as she cries, "I can't have this baby." And then there are those, truly on the frontline, who perform abortions.

For years I have worked in women's health as an ob/gyn, supporting patients through difficult times and difficult decisions. I remember twenty-five years ago when I first started in practice, alone in my office, learning life lessons I never learned in residency.

Eve, a young mother of two, was sent to my office by a surgeon colleague. She had been recently diagnosed with breast cancer, at about the same time she discovered she was pregnant. The pregnancy was something she and her husband had planned, wanting a third and probably last child. Eve sat across from me in my office, calmly explaining her situation. Then, suddenly, she blurted out, "I need an abortion." And the tears started flowing. "I want this child," she said through her tears, "but I also need to be alive for my other two children."

And there lay her dilemma. She could start chemotherapy for this aggressive breast cancer, but that would essentially poison her fetus. Or, she could wait nine months for treatment and risk the cancer spreading throughout her body. This was not an immediate life-or-death situation, but the longer she stayed pregnant, the more likely the cancer would kill her. She and her husband spent sleepless nights going back and forth trying to make a decision between two terrible options.

Two days later, I held her hand as the anesthesiologist put medication in her IV. She lay there quietly, squeezing my hand, tears running down her cheeks until she fell asleep.

I have quietly performed abortions my entire career. It is a very small part of my practice, but an option that I feel is important to my patients. I've never doubted that this choice is a right every woman should have.

But now, for the first time, I am weighing *my* choice: Is it worth risking my life to offer this service?

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