

July More Voice – Abortion: Then and Now

Category: Abortion: Then and Now
written by Paul Gross | June 30, 2022

Dear *Pulse* readers,

About a dozen years ago, a fourteen-year-old teenager presented to me with some vague symptoms. She was accompanied by her aunt.

The symptoms included abdominal discomfort. I asked to speak with her alone and asked if she'd ever had sexual relations. She looked puzzled, as if she didn't quite know what that meant. "No," she said. She seemed so young and lacking in life experience that I believed her.

Still, I ordered a urine pregnancy test, just to be on the safe side.

It was positive.

When I gave her the news, she was shocked—and terrified. It was as if she'd been hit by a meteor.

She did not want her aunt to know—and she absolutely did not want to continue the pregnancy.

I called Planned Parenthood myself to determine their procedures. I pressed their phone number into her hand and urged her to call them. I knew that they could provide the counseling and help she needed.

Years prior, I'd worked as a legal secretary for the ACLU in Illinois, at a time when the state legislature was on a mission to make abortions as difficult as possible to obtain. One of their measures required minors to get parental consent for an abortion, even though some of these teen pregnancies would be the result of paternal incest. There was one way out: A minor could petition a judge and get special permission to have an abortion.

I imagined this fourteen-year-old girl before me trying to navigate the judicial system when even placing a phone call to Planned Parenthood seemed to challenge her.

It's stories like hers that have shaped my belief that abortion is a right that should be protected, and I thought of her when I heard the news last week of the Supreme Court's decision striking down *Roe v. Wade*.

I realize that some principled people have other stories that have led them to different beliefs.

I've cared for patients with religious beliefs that preclude abortion. I've respected their convictions and made sure that they received the care they wanted and needed.

I fear for women who live in states where that belief has been codified into law. Some of those women will become terrified and desperate, just as my patient did, when they learn they are pregnant. I fear the consequences of their desperation.

As a physician, it disturbs me that a doctor who delivers an abortion in New York is still giving patient-centered care, while one who does the same in Texas is now committing a crime.

And given my experience caring for pregnant women, I believe that all pregnant women deserve a private conversation with a healthcare provider. They deserve a discussion of safe options and access to those options.

What about you? What's been your experience with abortion—as a patient, a healthcare provider or a caregiver? Do you worry about the impact of the recent Court decision on yourself, on your patients or on your friends or your children?

The July *More Voices* theme is Abortion: Then and Now. Use the [More Voices Submission Form](#) to send us your lived experience of contemplating, experiencing, delivering or accompanying someone in their decision to have—or not have—an abortion.

For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme: [Gun Violence](#).

Remember, your health-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With warm regards,

Paul Gross
Editor