



## **Pennsylvania-based “Crisis Pregnancy Centers” are Promoting Unethical Medical Experimentation on Pregnant People**

*40% of Pennsylvania-based CPCs Promote Renegade Practice Known as “Abortion Pill Reversal”*

(PENNSYLVANIA, September 15, 2020) – A recent investigation shows that forty percent of “crisis pregnancy centers” based in Pennsylvania promote an unethical experimental practice on pregnant people called “abortion pill reversal.”

“Claims regarding abortion ‘reversal’ treatment are not based on science and do not meet clinical standards,” according to a statement issued by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). “So-called abortion ‘reversal’ procedures are unproven and unethical.”

Despite warnings from medical experts, the anti-abortion movement is focused on pushing “abortion pill reversal” from the fringes of anti-science activism into mainstream awareness through crisis pregnancy centers and laws mandating doctors mislead patients by claiming they can “reverse” a medical abortion. Like CPC websites, such laws “essentially encourage women to participate in an unmonitored research experiment,” according to [an analysis](#) in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

During a medical abortion, a patient takes two drugs—first mifepristone, then misoprostol. Studies show it is a safe and effective method with no reports of long-term risks.

The renegade practice of “abortion pill reversal” is based on a theory developed by an anti-choice activist physician who conducted experiments on seven pregnant women in a study not supervised by an institutional review board or ethical review committee, per ACOG. The practice involves administering high doses of progesterone to pregnant people who have taken mifepristone, the first of two drugs used for a medical abortion, and discouraging consumption of the second drug, misoprostol.

The FDA has not approved of dispensing mifepristone without misoprostol, or this use of progesterone. The health effects on patient and pregnancy are unknown.

“Anti-abortion activists are openly promoting medical experimentation with unknown health effects on pregnant Pennsylvanians,” says Susan J. Frietsche, director of the Western Pennsylvania office of the Women’s Law Project. “It’s unethical, dangerous, and echoes the darkest days of American history when brown and Black bodies were grotesquely exploited for medical experimentation. Does the state even know if Real Alternatives, the umbrella organization of CPCs that has so far received more than \$100 million in taxpayer money, is participating in or promoting this abusive practice?”

A [systematic review](#) conducted in the wake of the seven-person experiment found no evidence that pregnancy continuation was more likely after treatment with progesterone as compared with expectant management among women who had only taken mifepristone.

“Crisis pregnancy centers target vulnerable people experiencing unplanned pregnancies. Many people who wind up at a CPC wouldn’t necessarily know they were being misled about their reproductive

choices,” says Amal Bass, WLP director of policy and advocacy. “Beyond the obvious danger of experimentally dispensing powerful medicine to pregnant people, I worry about the person who might start a medical abortion even if they aren’t sure it’s the right decision for them because they were misled to believe they can simply change their mind. This undermines informed consent in a particularly cruel way.”

The anti-abortion movement’s new emphasis on promoting abortion pill reversal coincides with the crisis pregnancy center movement’s increased efforts to target Black and brown clients.

“We are just [beginning](#) to reckon with our country’s long, shameful history of racist and sexist medical abuse,” says WLP attorney Christine Castro, “And now we’re seeing a coordinated effort to promote a new form of racist and sexist experimentation on pregnant people.”

Last year, the American Medical Association filed a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a North Dakota bill that attempted to force doctors to mislead patients by telling them about abortion pill reversal. [The AMA said](#) such laws “forc[ed] physicians ...to act as mouthpieces for politically motivated messages that are misleading and could lead to patient harm.” In September, a judge [blocked](#) the law, stating it was “devoid of scientific support, misleading, and untrue.”

This March, a watchdog group called Campaign for Accountability [asked the FDA to seize websites promoting this practice](#).

Women’s Law Project and its partners in The Alliance, a collaboration of regional law centers working to ensure equitable access to evidence-based reproductive healthcare, conducted this analysis as part of a larger project. The Alliance law centers - Gender Justice, Legal Voice, Southwest Women’s Law Center, and Women’s Law Project – are working with California Women’s Law Center and reproductive epidemiologist Dr. Laura Dodge to conduct a systematic analysis of crisis pregnancy centers in Alaska, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington State.

Of the nine states included in this review, Pennsylvania has the second-highest rate of promoting “abortion pill reversal.” Washington State’s APR promotion rate was the highest, at 49 percent.

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