

Ohio baby survives abortion procedure - Late-term bid ends in premature labor

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A premature baby girl is listed in serious but stable condition at an Ohio hospital after surviving preparatory procedures her mother underwent for a late-term abortion - reportedly a partial-birth abortion.

Maureen Britell, government relations director for the National Abortion Federation, yesterday confirmed that a woman gave birth at a Dayton hospital earlier this month after "experiencing premature labor at home following an earlier cervical dilation" she underwent at the Women's Med Center, a Dayton abortion clinic.

The baby in question, born Aug. 4 at Good Samaritan Hospital, was born 25 or 26 weeks into the 40 weeks of a full-term pregnancy, said Mary K. McClelland, spokeswoman for the Montgomery County [Ohio] Children Services Board. The board has temporary custody of the infant.

"Her condition is still very tenuous because of her size. She was born several months early . . . and this can lead to a lot of complications," Miss McClelland said in a telephone interview yesterday. She was unable to provide the baby's weight but said the child is in an incubator and on a respirator.

The county has filed for permanent custody of the baby and will make her available for adoption if no one in the mother's family wants her, Miss McClelland said.

"The recent birth of this very premature baby . . . appears to be the result of a partial-birth abortion gone awry," said Peggy Lehner, executive director of Dayton Right to Life.

"The baby . . . escaped the final, fatal stage of the three-day late-term procedure because the mother started into labor before the third day," the pro-life leader added.

Mrs. Lehner said her organization received an anonymous call about the baby's birth when the mother showed up at Good Samaritan Hospital in labor. Mrs. Lehner said she consequently talked with some hospital officials who privately confirmed that the baby survived what was to have been a partial-birth abortion.

In the two days before such a procedure, a pregnant woman undergoes dilation of her cervix as an outpatient. "The abortionist inserts a drug into the woman's cervix, which causes it to dilate [and expand]. The woman goes home, or in many cases to a local hotel, during this phase of the procedure. Some women apparently react to this drug much more rapidly than others, and premature labor begins," said Mrs. Lehner.

On the third day, a doctor, using forceps, delivers the baby feet-first, except for the head. The physician then punctures the baby in the back of the neck, suctions out the brains and collapses the skull, killing it.

This is, at least, the second time in four months a woman about to undergo a late-term abortion at the Women's Med Center of Dayton has experienced premature labor and delivered a live child. But, in the previous case, which involved a 22-week-old female fetus known as "Baby Hope," born in a Cincinnati hospital, the infant lived for only three hours.

"Baby Hope's" mother had been slated to have a partial-birth abortion. And doctors at the hospital elected not to provide her baby with medical care because of her prematurity.

The Women's Med Center of Dayton is actually the home of partial-birth abortion. Its owner, Dr. Martin Haskell, developed the procedure, which he initially called "dilation and extraction."

Dr. Haskell first described it at a National Abortion Federation convention in 1992. The National Right to Life Committee and other pro-life groups learned of his remarks and quickly spread the word to the media.

Public outrage over this procedure - which pro-lifers dubbed "partial-birth abortion" since it involves killing an already partially delivered child - led Congress and at least 28 states to pass legislation banning most such procedures. But the laws have been blocked in 20 of those states as a result of court challenges.

The ban enacted in Ohio in 1995 was the nation's first. But it was later struck down by a federal judge as being too vague. A rewritten version of the legislation is being considered by the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee.

And while Congress has twice approved a national ban, President Clinton has twice vetoed it. The federal ban measure was reintroduced in Congress in late April and is expected to be considered in the Senate in October.

Dr. Haskell testified as an expert witness in a trial resulting from a legal challenge of a partial-birth abortion ban passed in Wisconsin. He said he has performed approximately 2,000 D&X procedures, which he now calls "intact D&E (dilation and evacuation) abortions."

Traditional D&E abortions, the most common type of pregnancy termination during the second trimester, involve dismembering the fetus. Dr. Haskell said he prefers doing the "intact D&E" or "D&X" procedure after 20 weeks gestation because bones and ligaments become tougher and stronger at that age and are more difficult to pull apart.

Ohio pro-lifers were shocked to learn that the mother of the premature baby girl now recovering at Children's Medical Center in Dayton was into her 25th or 26th week of pregnancy when the child was born. Dr. Haskell has previously testified he does not do abortions after 24 weeks. And he told the court in the Wisconsin trial he does not perform abortions on viable fetuses.