

Simple procedure underlies emotion

By MYRNA MILLER
Assistant Features Editor

The doctor walks into the room. He explains what he is about to do in a low, professional tone. When he is sure the patient is comfortable with the procedure, he begins.

First, he inserts a plastic tube into her cervix and uterus. Suction is applied, and within five to 10 minutes the uterine contents are removed.

The abortion is complete. It only takes a few minutes to have an abortion — a fact many people don't know about the process.

In July, the Supreme Court legalized increased state restrictions on abortion, and many Americans have found themselves in the middle of something they feel strongly about but don't completely understand. What happens inside an abortion clinic is a mystery to many of those who participate in the emotional pro-life or pro-choice rallies.

"It really doesn't look much different from a normal doctor's office," said Brian Brenner, a representative of one local abortion facility.

Although some women choose clinics

One of every three girls who has an abortion will have another one, according to state health statistics for 1987.

ics for pregnancy counseling, many others go to a private gynecologist or hospital. But no matter what facility she chooses, the process is basically the same.

Brenner, marketing director for the Triangle Women's Health Center, described what a woman who is considering an abortion goes through there.

When a woman with an unwanted pregnancy goes to the office, she is first given a free pregnancy test and talks with the center's personnel about her situation. Counselors discuss the options of keeping the child, giving the child up for adoption or aborting the child.

"A lot of these girls are usually scared and have to do a lot of soul-searching,"

Brenner said. "We make sure they know they have time to think things out and make a decision."

However, the counselor stresses that the longer someone waits to have an abortion, the more expensive and risky it may become.

The center's fee for aborting a fetus under 12 weeks old is \$245, compared to \$575 for someone 15 to 16 weeks along in her pregnancy. Later, when the fetus is between 18 and 20 weeks old, the price increases to \$1,000 plus hospital costs because the procedure is much more difficult and cannot be performed at the center, Brenner said.

If a patient decides to have an abortion after the counseling session, she then makes an appointment. The center ensures complete confidentiality. "We perform abortions on girls 13 years old and up without anybody else's consent," Brenner said.

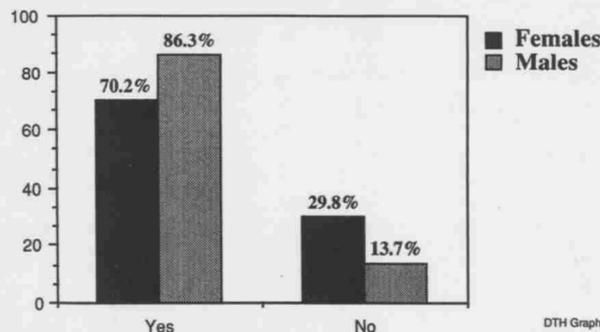
However, most people who have an abortion in Chapel Hill aren't that young. Less than 1 percent of the 1987 abortions in Chapel Hill were performed on women younger than 14.

Patients between 20 and 24 years old made up the largest proportion of abortion patients — 47 percent — according to data compiled by the State Center for Health Statistics, N.C. Division of Health Services. Women between the ages of 15 and 19 made up the next largest group, totaling 29 percent.

Once a patient signs a consent form and comes into the clinic on the day of her abortion, she again goes through a counseling session. This time counselors tell her in detail about birth control methods and the abortion process itself.

"We try to get her to commit to some form of birth control before she leaves our office," Brenner said. "If some-

"Would you consider having an abortion or letting your girlfriend have an abortion?"



Where we found the numbers

The DTH Abortion Survey was conducted on Sept. 6 and 7, 1989. Surveys were given out in the Pit. There were 184 response sheets filled out. Forty-three percent of those surveyed were men and 57 percent were women. The survey was organized by the arts and features desk of the DTH and cannot be considered scientific.

body doesn't practically force her to make the decision, she will probably end up here again."

One of every three girls who has an abortion will have another one, according to state health statistics for 1987.

Next, the patient changes clothes in a private room and waits for the doctor. He leads her into the operating room and talks about the procedure with her. "It helps relieve some of the anxiety they are feeling if they know what is going to happen," Brenner said.

The room in which the abortion takes place looks like the examining room in any gynecologist's office. The only difference is the presence of a curtain-covered machine in one corner.

This one-piece of machinery—which makes a rumbling, humming noise when turned on—is the heart of dilation and evacuation (D&E), one type of abortion.

The machine looks harmless enough, topped with bottles that have rubber tubes sticking out of them.

The process is fairly simple. The plastic tube is placed through the vagina and into the uterus. Suction re-

moves the contents. Sometimes the physician needs to enlarge the cervical opening by inserting small metal dilators.

Although the center performs only the D&E technique, other clinics and hospitals may use induced labor when necessary. Vern Katz, a staff physician at North Carolina Memorial Hospital, discussed the hospital's methods.

"The type of abortion depends on the gestational age and the reason for having the abortion," he said. "Most people don't use the saline solution to induce labor anymore, and we use prostaglandin to induce contractions."

During the abortion, most patients remain conscious with only a local anesthesia administered. Usually, the center gives medicine only to induce sleep if the patient is more than 16 weeks along in her pregnancy.

Afterward, the patient sits in a recovery room for an hour of observation. At this time, nurses give her blood tests and sample birth control packs.

"Many women go right back to work," Brenner said. Normally, the patient experiences a blood flow as in

normal menstruation.

Two weeks later, the patient returns to the center for a follow-up exam that includes a PAP smear and another talk about using birth control in the future. The center's psychotherapist deals with any emotional problems that patients may have at this time.

"Counseling is extremely important," Katz said. Many women suffer short-term emotional effects after an abortion, even if they don't leave a long-term emotional scar, he said.

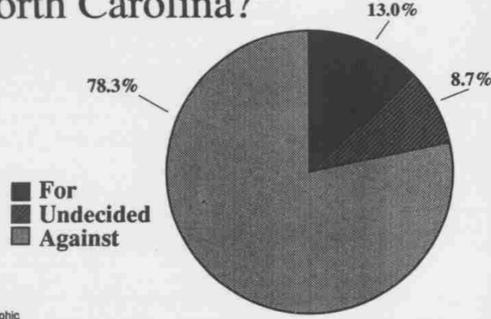
"Most of them have thought about it a lot, and they are very sad and feel a sense of loss," he said. "It is not something to be taken lightly."

Katz said many of the abortions performed at the hospital are on fetuses with genetic defects.

During 1987, the licensed facilities of North Carolina reported 35,544 abortions to the State Center for Health Statistics, an increase of 30 percent over the number reported in 1978.

The total number of abortions in Chapel Hill was 259.

"How would you vote on a bill to restrict abortion in North Carolina?"



DTH Graphic

A life-saving decision for student with bright future

By MYRNA MILLER
Assistant Features Editor

"This just can't be happening to me."

Cynthia Shang was 19, an A student at Duke University — and she was pregnant.

She made a choice that she now says changed her life — she decided to have an abortion.

That was five years ago. Shang, 24, now is happily married to the man whose child she decided not to have five years ago.

She grew up in a lower-class family in New Jersey with four brothers and sisters. Her parents didn't have the money to support their family and decided they weren't going to have any more children.

"My mother got kicked out of the Catholic Church because she decided to use an IUD because she couldn't handle any more children," Shang said.

In high school, Shang was competitive in her studies and activities. As a member of the National Honor Society, the math club and the track team, she was one of those students who had everything going for her.

However, the one thing Shang wasn't involved in was the social scene. "I didn't date at all in high school. I even begged somebody to go to the prom with me. I was a virgin until I was 19, and I was proud of it."

During her junior year of college, she met Warren Shang, then a sophomore at Duke. "Warren had something I was missing, and he gave me back my confidence," she said.

When Cynthia and Warren became sexually involved, they didn't take any chances. "We were diligent about making sure we were protected," she said. "I always had my diaphragm, or he used a condom."

It was a scary day for her when she began experiencing the symptoms of pregnancy. "I thought, 'No, I've done everything right. It's not possible.'"

After two days of waiting, she rushed to a clinic. The doctor confirmed her suspicions — she was six weeks pregnant.

"I went to a counselor, and she talked to me about giving the child up for adoption or keeping it. She never mentioned abortion until I asked her," she said.

Cynthia made a tentative appointment for an abortion and went back home in a daze. "I was well on my way to getting a computer science degree. I didn't want my parents to have any more financial burden, and I didn't want to force Warren to get married. I was just not ready to have a child," she said. "Although some people say they could never live with aborting their child, I knew I couldn't live with having a child."

Giving the child up for adoption seemed even worse, she said. "I would be thinking every day that my child was out there somewhere. He could be being abused or anything."

At 2:30 a.m., a sobbing Cynthia called her father and told him, "Dad, oh God, I'm pregnant."

He laughed. When she asked him how he could laugh, he told her it was no big deal. "He said, 'It's not the end of the world, Cynthia. You can do what you feel is right.' Suddenly, I felt a whole lot better."

Warren also told Cynthia he would support her in whatever decision she made.

When she went for her abortion, she and five other girls talked with a counselor for an hour about why they

decided to have an abortion. "They made us talk about our decision," she said. "Then they left us in the room for another hour just to think about things and told us that everyone and anyone was free to leave."

The abortion procedure itself was simple, Cynthia said. "It only took about 15 minutes, and the only problem I had was a few cramps."

Afterward, she said: "I felt safe and I realized how many lives I was saving. I was saving my life, my boyfriend's life and my parents' lives as they knew it."

Two years later, on May 29, 1988, Cynthia married Warren Shang. She is happy with her marriage but says she is still not ready for children.

"I'm not anti-family; I'm just not ready for a family yet," she said. "We will have children, but only when we are ready to want to."

Shang said she has never regretted her decision to have the abortion. "I'm a thinker, not just a breeder," she said. "I don't make anyone have an abortion. They can't make me have a baby."



Cynthia Shang married the father of her aborted child but says she still is not ready for a family

Regrets, pain haunt woman for making 'wrong choice'

By JESSICA YATES
Assistant Arts Editor

It's a five to ten minute procedure, usually uncomplicated, and besides, it's just "pregnancy tissue."

That's what Katharine Berkowitz was told when she entered an abortion clinic in Forsyth County when she was 19. Ten years later, she is still angry and frustrated that no one told her the truth about deliberate pregnancy termination.

"When I had it done, I wasn't really happy about it, but I went in anyway," she said. "At the time, I felt like I didn't have any other alternative."

Berkowitz said the abortion was painful, but as she was told, it was a fairly quick and easy procedure. The real pain, according to Berkowitz, comes during the months and even years after the abortion.

"I experienced a lot of depression in the years afterward, and I wasn't aware of where it was coming from," she said.

Later, Berkowitz married and became pregnant. "When I was 24 weeks pregnant, I went into premature labor," she said. The baby — weighing 1 pound, 9 ounces —

"A lot of people out there are hurting, no matter what side they're on."

—Katherine Berkowitz

didn't survive. The state of North Carolina issued him a birth certificate, though, recognizing the child as a person.

"My best friend had just had an abortion in the hospital at 24 weeks, and yet they did not consider her fetus a person," Berkowitz said. "I found that really contradictory, and I couldn't deal with it."

She later told the doctor who had performed her abortion about the problems she had with her pregnancy. According to Berkowitz, he said the abortion "might have had something to do with it."

Raleigh attorney Susan Renfer said she became involved with the pro-life side of the abortion issue when she started working with women like Berkowitz who had experienced physical and/or emotional problems following abortion.

"It's called post-abortion syndrome, a specific type of post-traumatic stress disorder," said Renfer, who represented the state's Department of Human Resource in Whittington v. Flaherty, a court case concerning the state's abortion fund.

The American Psychiatric Association has recognized the validity of abortion-related trauma, Renfer said.

"A woman frequently suppresses the pain, only to have it come up in a later date," she said. The syndrome is similar in many respects to the stress disorder often associated with Vietnam veterans.

Problems can be emotional as well as physical. "Severe infections are the most common complication, but many women also experience punctured or torn uteruses, especially teenagers whose bodies haven't fully developed," she said. Authorities have linked abortion to sterility, she added.

Renfer has lobbied for the Right to Life group in the General Assembly and now works in Chicago for another pro-life group, Americans United for Life. She will work as an attorney there for four months and then return to Raleigh to work in the chapter here.

Berkowitz is also involved in helping people understand what the immediate and delayed effects of abortion are. She works in local support groups, such as Open Arms, which try to help women come to terms with their decision.

"I don't condemn people who decide to have abortions because I had one myself, but for me it was the wrong decision," she said.

Berkowitz believes that accurate information about the abortion procedure and its prolonged effects would have relieved some of the pain she experienced. "My regret may have at least been lessened if I had known more about abortion, especially about the grief I would feel and about the possible physical complications I discovered could occur when I tried to have children," she said.

Although the legality and funding of abortion is often in the forefront of politics, Berkowitz insists the emotional issue for women is equally important.

"A lot of people out there are hurting, no matter what side they're on," she said. "It's real lives we're talking about here."