

South Dakota Enacts Far-Reaching Abortion Ban

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The sweeping abortion ban signed into law last month in South Dakota has sent shock waves through reproductive medicine and could lead to a Supreme Court showdown on the legality of abortion.

The law makes it a felony to perform an abortion except in cases where the mother's life is in danger and prohibits the administering, prescribing, procuring, or selling of any substance that terminates a pregnancy. But the law does allow the sale of contraceptives that can be administered before a pregnancy "could be determined through conventional medical testing."

The "Women's Health and Human Life Protection Act," which is set to take effect in July, will likely face an immediate court challenge from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Planned Parenthood's Sioux Falls clinic is the only abortion clinic in the state, and officials there

In reaction to the new South Dakota law banning the procedure, 'there will be a pendulum swing toward restrictions on abortion' in other states.

have vowed to exhaust all legal options to prevent the ban from taking effect.

Physicians on both sides of the debate said that they see the new law as a watershed event.

"This is very dangerous," said Dr. Warren

Hern, director of the Boulder (Colorado) Abortion Clinic. "You cannot practice medicine in this kind of an environment."

Antiabortion advocates have made abortion an ideological issue, he said, instead of a public health issue. Dr. Hern said he suspects that even if the law doesn't go into effect, many women in South Dakota will think the procedure is illegal.

Even without a ban, access is limited because fewer and fewer physicians want to perform abortions, Dr. Hern said. Performing abortions is the way to the bottom in medicine, he said, and physicians who specialize in performing abortion have become targets for assassination.

"They don't have to make abortion illegal," Dr. Hern said.

Banning abortion will not eliminate the procedure, said Dr. Suzanne T. Poppema, a vice chair of Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, but it will jeopardize women's health.

If the South Dakota ban goes into effect, many women will be forced to travel to other states for abortions, she said. Those who can't afford to travel out of state may try to buy abortifacients online, if they have Internet access. In that case, physicians can expect to see bleeding complications in emergency departments, Dr. Poppema said.

Aside from the potential health effects on women in the state, Dr. Poppema said she resents the idea of politicians telling

physicians how to practice medicine. "I think that politicians insinuating themselves into the doctor-patient relationship is not a good thing," she said.

But Dr. Gene Rudd, associate executive director of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations, said the government is already involved in the practice of medicine and placing restrictions on abortion is an appropriate role.

Dr. Rudd said there will always be women who opt to have abortions, but he

expects the number of abortions would fall dramatically if the procedure were outlawed or severely restricted.

Whether or not the new law survives efforts to block its implementation, it is already having ramifications in other states. "There will be a pendulum swing toward restrictions on abortion," he said.

The law was also praised by the American Association of Pro Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Dr. Joe DeCook, vice president of the group, said a ban on abor-

tion is in the interest of women, who face both negative emotional and physical consequences from abortion.

Ten other states—Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and West Virginia—are considering bans on abortion that are similar to the one enacted in South Dakota or laws that would ban abortion automatically if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned by the Supreme Court, according to Planned Parenthood. ■

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