

Antiabortion groups join fight in Englewood case

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▲ Pat Mullen of Fair Lawn, left, and Bill Foster of Ridgewood protesting with other antiabortion activists in a rally outside Metropolitan Medical Associates in Englewood on Thursday.

ENGLEWOOD -- Antiabortion activists gathered in front of Metropolitan Medical Associates on Thursday and called for the clinic to be permanently shut down.

Metropolitan Medical has been closed temporarily by the state amid allegations of malpractice and deficient care after a woman who had an abortion at the clinic suffered massive hemorrhaging and fell into a four-week coma.

Rasheedah Dinkins, 20, filed a lawsuit Thursday alleging that the clinic and its physicians acted "negligently, carelessly and recklessly" in providing medical care.

Dinkins also suffered a stroke and internal injuries and underwent a hysterectomy after the Jan. 27 abortion.

"I'm really angry, because it was pure negligence," Dinkins' mother, Michelle Lewis, said at a Thursday news conference. "This shouldn't happen. It shouldn't happen at all."

Dinkins, who regained consciousness last Friday, was moved on Thursday to the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange. She will need physical therapy to recover mobility on her left side, said her lawyer, Adam Slater.

The lawsuit aims to find out what happened and why the clinic sent Dinkins home in her condition, Slater said.

"This is an extraordinarily bad result from a simple procedure -- something that's supposed to be a very low-risk procedure," Slater said.

Dinkins, a mother of two from Newark, became sluggish and unconscious just hours after returning home from the clinic. She was taken to Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, where doctors gave Dinkins a 20-unit blood transfusion and removed her damaged uterus.

On Jan. 31, Beth Israel filed a formal complaint with the state. An investigation followed, and after a routine licensing survey, the state Department of Health shut down the clinic, citing "immediate and serious risk of harm to patients."

Slater praised Beth Israel for saving Dinkins' life and for reporting another medical facility to the state.

"I've never heard of that before -- it's really extraordinary," Slater said. "There is something positive coming out of the story."

Metropolitan Medical -- which performs more than 10,000 abortions a year and is one of the largest clinics in the state -- declined to comment Thursday. The doors of the Engle Street building remained locked while about a dozen activists lined the sidewalk with signs, calling the clinic "a place of evil."

"Women deserve better than abortions, and they certainly deserve better than a botched abortion," said demonstrator Carol Lavis from Montvale.

"I feel that today is actually a blessing in disguise," said Hector Ferrer, creative director for Crossing Over Ministry based in Dallas. "It's going to give this state and this nation an opportunity to realize the harmful effect that abortion has on not just the unborn babies, but on women as well."

Complications from abortions are extremely rare, so much so that they are generally considered safer than childbirth.

Gloria Mozas, a former patient who also has a pending lawsuit against the clinic, attended the demonstration to share her own experiences at Metropolitan Medical. She had come to the clinic in October 2003 seeking an ultrasound and a pregnancy test. Physicians failed to spot Mozas' ectopic pregnancy and told her she had a miscarriage. Days later, the Cliffside Park woman ended up in an emergency room with a rupture and internal bleeding, she said.

"A zoo is better than this place," said Mozas, 36, who is on disability with post-traumatic stress disorder. "I'm asking the state, I'm asking the governor, I'm asking whoever it takes, to never open these doors again."

Dinkins, however, is not calling for Metropolitan Medical to be shut down, Slater said. The family said they had no opinion about Thursday's rally at the clinic and added that the lawsuit is not politically motivated.

"My daughter said to me that she wants her story told because she doesn't want this to ever happen to another lady," Lewis added.

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