

Unmasking FAKE Clinics

An Investigation into California's Crisis Pregnancy Centers



NARAL
Pro-Choice California Foundation

Over the last year, NARAL Pro-Choice California conducted a comprehensive undercover investigation of crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) in California. Our investigators made 49 in-person visits to more than 25% of all CPCs in the state. Of those visited, an estimated 19 were licensed as community or free clinics by the California Department of Public Health and the rest are unlicensed centers. Although our investigators presented different scenarios and life circumstances – from wanting an abortion to not sure about what to do; from having a supportive family to living in an abusive situation; from wanting to stay in school to not having the resources to raise a family – the response was frightening in its consistency: **You Should Have A Baby No Matter What. This constant pressure was never accompanied with suggestions to see a doctor in order to have a healthy pregnancy. The so-called counseling was completely biased in one direction and did not allow for women to weigh all of their options based on her circumstances.**

These centers fraudulently present themselves as medical offices while their true intent is to lie to and shame women about their reproductive health options. CPCs use a wide array of deceptive tactics to push women to continue their pregnancies no matter what.

Our investigation documents the lies told to our investigators and the shaming tactics used to discourage women from considering all of their options. A recently released national report by NARAL Pro-Choice America, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers Lie: The Insidious Threat to Reproductive Health*, confirms that CPCs are a threat to women's reproductive health not only in California, but across the country.

CPCs Lie.

CPC workers are well-trained to lie to women about physical and mental health issues they claim are associated with abortion. At every visit, our investigator reported that CPC workers repeated a similar set of lies and myths, noting, "it was scary how they all said the same things, it was like it didn't matter who I was, they only had one script."

In 91 percent of the centers visited, this script included telling our investigator that having an abortion was linked to an increased risk of breast cancer, infertility, miscarriage, and/or the made-up "post-abortion depression" that results in suicide. These are blatant lies that have been disproved and rejected by the medical community.

Incidents of CPC Medical Lies

Breast Cancer Abortion Link	Post-Abortion Stress	Misleading Fetal Development	Infertility Abortion Link	Misleading Abortion Risks
46.51%	72.09%	23.26%	34.88%	65.12%

One common scare tactic focused on the ability of a woman to have a healthy pregnancy in the future if she accessed abortion care. "She told me that for some women, they dilate them too fast and they might become ... not infertile, but in later cases ... they might miscarry a lot because the cervix might not close up all the way. So I might have a lot of miscarriages if I aborted the baby."

Timing is critical when making decisions about an unintended pregnancy and the CPCs we visited deliberately worked to delay those decisions. Accessing abortion care early in a pregnancy is safe, more easily accessible and more affordable. CPCs attempt to lull women into believing they have as much time as they want to make a decision. CPC workers tell women that they don't need to make a decision because their pregnancy may terminate naturally, stating that the likelihood of a miscarriage is 30-50 percent. In fact, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that approximately 15 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage.

From the Los Angeles Pregnancy Services website:



Did you know?:

- 1 in 5 pregnancies will end naturally.
- Do not seek an abortion before you have confirmed from an ultrasound that the pregnancy is viable.
- A random act of sex will only result in pregnancy 3-4% of the time. It is so hard to make a good decision when you are feeling pressured by family or friends. It is more important than ever, at that time, to have as much information as possible to help in moving forward with a decision.

<http://lapregnancyservices.clickforward.com/options.php?adid-2E343B92-B097-442c-BFA5->

For organizations that claim to offer pregnancy counseling, they know surprisingly little about pregnancy, abortion, and birth control. The use of birth control is intentionally confused with abortion at CPCs. Our investigation found that at 63% of centers visited, the investigator was given misinformation about birth control and Plan B, the morning after pill.

“They had these booklets where it showed different methods of birth control; IUD, the ring, the depo shot, and all that. So I started reading them, and none of them said what the benefits were – all of them said the risks, the bad side effects, and how all of them cause ‘medical abortions.’”

CPCs only offer abstinence as the sole option to prevent pregnancy. When our investigator asked how to avoid unintended pregnancies in the future, she was told “in order to not get pregnant, it would be best to stop whoring around.” She was also told that “everybody should just stop using birth control because it’s not healthy for your body; it’s not good for you.”

No Doctor Needed

While posing as legitimate reproductive-health clinics--locating in medical buildings or near a real abortion clinic, wearing white lab coats, calling themselves counselors – CPCs purposefully do not provide the medical services that pregnant women need, whether to continue a pregnancy or to terminate a pregnancy. In several scenarios, our investigator presented medical conditions that should be discussed with a licensed medical professional. For instance, our investigator often complained of severe headaches and bleeding but was rarely told to see a doctor nor was she asked any further questions to determine the cause. She was always told it was “normal.”

In three of the visits, our investigator brought up issues of abuse. Our investigator presented herself as someone who had a wanted, unplanned pregnancy but had concerns about increased abuse. The CPC staff did not ask if she was safe or had a safe place to go to. According to the UCSF Medical Center, “domestic violence is more common than any other health problem among women during pregnancy. It greatly threatens both the mother’s and the baby’s health.”

CPCs neglect to provide or refer to adequate counseling and care for women facing potentially dangerous circumstances—all that matters is that the woman not terminate her pregnancy. CPC workers’ uninformed, non-medical zeal could have serious health consequences for women. For example, every CPC strongly insisted our investigator have an ultrasound. In one case when she agreed to an ultrasound, the CPC worker pointed to her IUD and told her it was “her baby.” In most cases, CPC workers are not medical practitioners. Since they only care about ending abortion access, they actually put women’s lives in danger by failing to provide any accurate medical information or prenatal care.

Early medical attention—from a real medical provider—helps identify concerns or challenges that may present themselves like an ectopic pregnancy, or problems with the pregnancy. Of the CPCs investigated that had ultrasounds on site, all pushed our investigator to get an ultrasound. Despite not hearing any fetal heartbeat, at no point was the CPC worker concerned or directed our investigator to see a real physician.

An unintended pregnancy can be a scary and uncertain time for women. Quickly accessing safe, accurate and comprehensive medical counseling and services is critical. Mistakenly turning to a CPC for guidance delays access to accurate information and counseling, and the misinformation can have long term health consequences.

CPCs Shame and Psychologically Manipulate Women

If the medical falsehoods about abortion don’t seem to be enough to dissuade a woman from considering abortion, CPCs ruthlessly shame and manipulate women. At a vulnerable time, CPCs delve into personal details during counseling to try to make women feel guilty about choosing abortion.

“We started getting more into why I was looking for an abortion ...I told her I didn’t want to get into that, I had a rough childhood and I didn’t want that for my kid. My mom had me young, she had to stay with my dad, and my dad was abusive... he abused me and my mom. And she told me that me doing that {getting an

abortion} would be repeating that cycle. I would be neglecting my kid the way that my dad neglected me. In a way I was repeating it, and I was being the same bad parent that my dad was.”

More than 67% of the locations intentionally referred to the fetus as “baby” and told our investigator she was already a mother because she was already pregnant. During a majority of visits, CPC workers used gruesome and graphic words to describe an abortion in the hopes of frightening and humiliating women. One CPC told our investigator that if an abortion is not done correctly chances are “they might puncture your uterus and vacuum your fallopian tubes shut.” This psychological warfare has no place in a real counseling session.

When an investigator told a CPC worker that her goal of going to college – the first in her family – she was told to put school aside and re-locate near her mother so she could help out. The idea that school was unimportant and could wait was shared in every single center.

Conclusion

After a year investigating crisis pregnancy centers across California, it became clear that CPCs only have one agenda: stop any woman from accessing abortion care, regardless of her situation. While the decision to continue with a pregnancy or seek abortion care is an extremely personal one, CPCs have no respect for the health, well being, and aspirations for the women who find themselves in their so-called “clinics.” Their lies, shaming tactics, and downright lack of knowledge of reproductive health care puts women in danger every day.

Methodology

To investigate California CPCs, NARAL Pro-Choice California trained 6 investigators to visit CPCs and to listen to what CPC staff offered as free counseling. Over the course of the year, our team of 6 investigators made 49 visits to 45 unique centers across 19 counties in California. That is over 25% of the roughly 167 CPCs in the state.¹ They went as potentially pregnant women who may be facing an unplanned pregnancy and needed both a pregnancy test and further knowledge of their options. The investigators presented 3 different scenarios:

- Being undecided about an unintended pregnancy (20 visits)
- Seeking an abortion and information about abortion for an unintended pregnancy (24 visits)
- Wanting to keep an unintended pregnancy (5 visits)

For each scenario, multiple variables surrounding life and health circumstances were presented. In the parenting scenario, potential health complications were brought up with the expectations of continuing a healthy pregnancy.

In accordance with California law, no audio or visual recordings were made during any visits or phone calls. After visiting a CPC, our investigators filled out a standard debriefing form that described all aspects of their visit: what they were told by staff, what they saw at the CPC, etc. Our investigators also collected promotional materials from all CPCs visited. Additional research examining the information on websites of each the 45 CPCs was also conducted.

Results from each visit were then broken down along 32 different parameters of the visit. Using the instance of any given parameter, ie discussed breast cancer abortion link or pushed for ultrasound, we calculated overall incidence of different strategies CPCs used throughout the investigation.

¹ Crisis Pregnancy Centers Lie: The Insidious Threat to Reproductive Freedom, 2015, available at <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/media/publications/cpc-report.html>