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Abortion Foes Get Offer To Hear Clinic Patients

By MICHAEL deCOURCY HINDS, Special to The New York Times
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YARDLEY, Pa., Dec. 1 — The owner of a much-picketed birthing center here that also does abortions has invited anti-abortion leaders to come inside to talk with his patients in counseling sessions rather than scream slogans at them outside.

The owner of the 13-year-old Yardley Birth Center, Dr. Vikram H. Kaji, is going ahead with the plan even though he knows it is not likely to stop the picketing and could turn out to be as fruitless as a similar program he tried in a clinic he owns in Bordentown, N.J.

"I still think it's a good idea, though there are pitfalls," said Dr. Kaji, an obstetrician who was given an award by a local hospital two years ago for, among other things, financing a hospital for polio victims in his native India.

Under Dr. Kaji's plan, patients entering his office would be given a brochure with photographs of fetal development and an invitation to speak to a trained counselor who opposes abortions in an adjoining office. Patients could discuss their situation and hear of alternatives. A member of Dr. Kaji's staff would sit in on the meetings to make sure that the counselor did not show any gory photographs of fetuses or try to obtain the patient's address, Dr. Kaji said.

Pickers to Be Counselors

The Bucks County Pro-Life Coalition, whose members have been picketing Dr. Kaji's clinic for more than a year, has been asked to provide the counselors for Dr. Kaji's program. The coalition is working out how it will conduct the sessions.

Experts on the abortion issue say Dr. Kaji's efforts to draw on abortion opponents for counseling patients appear to be the only ones in the nation. Anti-abortion groups like the Bucks County group applaud the idea, saying it could set a precedent. But those who favor a woman's right to abortion oppose it, saying that such counseling would not be neutral or nonjudgemental and could lead to violations of privacy.

Dr. Kaji says that he cannot judge the moral issues involved in abortion, but that women should have access to the procedure so long as it is legal. He also says that people who oppose abortion could be helpful in counseling some of his patients - the 5 to 10 percent still wavering when they arrive for the operation. The clinic's staff tries to spot women having second thoughts and

encourage them to postpone the operation, but he said it was difficult to detect those feelings in such an unhappy setting.

"Most women are shedding tears by the time they get into the operating room," Dr. Kaji said. "Nobody is happy here doing this." He said that he and his staff, including an obstetrician and two midwives, handle about 800 births and 600 abortions a year. New Restrictions on Abortion

Coincidentally, the plan comes just two weeks after Gov. Robert P. Casey of Pennsylvania signed into law a series of new restrictions on abortion. But as Dr. Kaji envisions the counseling sessions, they would not meet a provision requiring a physician to provide patients with detailed information about the development of a fetus, the risks of abortion and alternatives. The law, scheduled to take effect in the third week of January, may not be enforced until expected court challenges are resolved.

As Dr. Kaji described his plan in his office today, two dozen demonstrators and counterdemonstrators marched and chanted in front of his office on South Main Street, a few miles west of Trenton.