

# South Wind Women's Center hires doctor to be clinical coordinator

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Julie Burkhart and the **out-of-state doctor** were on the phone discussing the future of abortion in Wichita.

The founder of Trust Women, Burkhart kept mentioning George Tiller.

The OB/GYN jumped online to do a Google search for “Dr. Tiller.”

She had spent her career delivering babies to mothers who were happy to be pregnant. She wasn't sure who Burkhart was talking about.

Soon, she will provide abortions, family planning, exams and other health services to women in the clinic where Tiller became a key figure in the nation's turbulent debate over abortion, made legal shortly after the OB/GYN was born.

She has signed on to be the physician administrator and clinical coordinator of South Wind Women's Center, the clinic Trust Women plans to open at Tiller's former practice on Kellogg near Oliver.

“My experience in reproductive justice began Dec. 18, 2012,” the OB/GYN said Saturday during an interview in downtown Wichita. That's when she came to Wichita to meet Burkhart and tour the clinic.

She has been a board-certified OB/GYN for about 10 years but has **never performed elective abortions**. The doctor says abortion is probably not a choice she would make for herself.

But she believes that women have the right to that option and she said she felt a calling to step up to provide that option.

The doctor asked to not be named in this story.

Tiller was shot to death on a Sunday in May 2009 at his church by a man who opposed abortion.

The OB/GYN wants to remain anonymous for as long as she can.

When the clinic opens, she will have to provide her name to patients seeking to end pregnancies. That's part of Kansas' laws regulating abortion. She sees that as political — a doctor taking out a patient's gallbladder, she said, doesn't have to meet with them and provide their name.

Once her name becomes known, she said protesters will show up at her home like they have at Burkhart's home. Burkhart recently filed a protection from stalking petition against Wichita pastor Mark Holick, whom she said protested at her home one Friday last month with signs that said, "Where's your church?"

Because Scott Roeder shot Tiller to death while the doctor was serving as an usher at Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Burkhart took the sign as a threat.

Holick confirmed Saturday that "there was a group of us that went (to Burkhart's home). We had several signs, one of the signs did say that."

He said he had not been notified of the petition.

"This is the first I have heard about it," Holick said.

The OB/GYN wants to put off being in the spotlight for as long as she can.

"I haven't told most of my friends and most of my family," she said. "Right now I have a lot of work to do, and I don't need any disruptions."

David Gittrich, state development director for Kansans for Life, said his group "would never use violence" in its fight against abortion.

He questioned the doctor's motivation in remaining anonymous.

"You don't want anyone to know you're an abortionist," he said.

## **Need to step up**

The doctor doesn't remember a time when she didn't want to be a women's health care provider.

"My mom says I told her when I was 4 that I was going to be a baby doctor," she said.

Providing abortion care was never in her plans.

"My life was perfect the way it was," she said.

But the November elections infuriated her so much, she said, that she decided she needed to step up.

"I guess I was flabbergasted that we were fighting about things that were over and done with since before I was born," she said of abortion.

She said she was sick of hearing from politicians and candidates who oppose abortion. “These are real politicians who have power over my life,” she said.

## **Clinic’s services**

A friend of the doctor put her in contact with Burkhart, who worked with Tiller for years.

She will work with two other doctors, another OB/GYN and a family practice physician who will fly in as needed.

Burkhart has not said when the clinic will open, only sometime this spring.

The clinic will begin taking appointments two weeks before opening, the doctor said.

For now, Trust Women is referring women who need abortions to clinics in Oklahoma and Kansas City.

In addition to abortions up to 14 weeks, South Wind will offer well-woman exams, family planning, pre-natal care, adoption services and treatment for problems such as endometriosis and pelvic pain.

It will not offer late-term abortions.

Tiller was one of a handful of abortion providers who performed late-term procedures. Burkhart has said she knows of four doctors in the United States who do late-term abortions. One is Warren Hern, a close friend of Tiller’s who practices in Boulder, Colo.

Hern was a pallbearer at Tiller’s funeral and in some ways, his polar opposite. Tiller kept a low profile while Hern speaks out openly.

The Eagle interviewed Hern in Boulder after Tiller’s death. A sign inside his clinic’s lobby door cautioned patients, “For your safety, do not open this door for anyone who has not accompanied you.”

South Wind, on East Kellogg near Oliver, will have round-the-clock surveillance and security during operating hours.

Protesters have been showing up there the past couple months but have largely been low-key.

Gittrich said he expects formal protests. He added, though, that he still doesn’t believe the clinic will open.

“Just because they say they’re going to open doesn’t mean they’re going to,” he said.

Kansans for Life submitted a petition to city leaders asking them to rezone the clinic. The Metropolitan Area Planning Commission voted 6-4 late last month against initiating the rezoning of the clinic at 5107 E. Kellogg Drive.

The OB/GYN hopes because South Wind won't offer late-term abortions and because it will provide other women's care, it won't be as much of a target as Tiller's clinic was.

Burkhart has held security briefings for clinic staff, and the OB/GYN is learning to be aware of her surroundings.

The doctor said she won't be scared away.

"One in three women will have an abortion," she said, repeating an often-quoted statistic. "Low-income women who can't afford to take a day off to drive three hours deserve the same quality of services. I don't want women ordering pills over the Internet and not getting quality care."

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Read more here: <http://www.kansas.com/2013/03/09/2709682/south-wind-womens-center-hires.html#storylink=cpy>