

# Doctor probed after abortion causes death

By REX DALTON  
Staff Writer

The Medical Board of California is investigating a physician after a Tijuana woman died following an abortion last week at the doctor's San Ysidro clinic, officials say.

The medical board probe involves the actions of Dr. Suresh Gandotra, 45, who practices at El Norte Clinica Medica on San Ysidro Boulevard and lives in Orange County, officials say.

State authorities say they opened the probe after Magdalena Ortega-Rodriguez, 23, died Thursday night at Scripps Memorial Hospital in Chula Vista, where she had been taken by paramedics.

Evan L. Ginsburg, Gandotra's Fullerton attorney, said the patient's uterus accidentally was perforated during the abortion, prompting bleeding that led to her death.

"This is a standard risk of the procedure," said Ginsburg. "It is tragic. The doctor is devastated. We don't believe this was below the standard of care nor do we believe it is malpractice."

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## Physician

### Crime record preceded abortion-related death

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Gandotra could not be reached for comment yesterday.

State records show Gandotra has been under scrutiny by the medical board for several years for other problems, including criminal convictions for his practices in Orange County.

In May 1990, Gandotra was convicted in Orange County Superior Court of 17 felony and misdemeanor charges — including grand theft, Medi-Cal fraud, providing dangerous drugs to patients without proper authorization and aiding the unlicensed practice of medicine.

After serving a jail term of an undetermined number of months during 1990-91, Gandotra returned to practicing medicine, officials say.

In September 1993, the medical board filed an accusation against his medical license based on the 1990 convictions, records say. State officials say the accusation was delayed until 1993 because Gandotra unsuccessfully had appealed his criminal convictions in the courts.

State sources say that the medical board also has been investigating Gandotra for his practices in another abortion case in 1991.

Medical board spokeswoman Candis Cohen declined comment on the Gandotra case yesterday, except to say the matter is under investigation by the board and the state attorney general's office.

Margaret Lasko, a deputy attorney general who yesterday was assigned the Gandotra case, confirmed her agency's probe but declined further comment.

Depending on the results of the state probe, Gandotra could have his medical license revoked, suspended or placed on probation. State officials also could seek to

immediately suspend his license if they feel he is a danger to the public.

According to interviews with the county Medical Examiner's Office, police, paramedics, Scripps officials and Gandotra's office staff, the following are the events surrounding Ortega-Rodriguez's death:

Like many of Gandotra's other patients, the woman came from Tijuana to San Ysidro last Thursday to pay cash for an abortion at the clinic in a small shopping center.

At 4:27 p.m., paramedics received a call that a woman was in cardiac arrest undergoing cardiopulmonary resuscitation at the El Norte Clinica Medica. Paramedics picked up Ortega-Rodriguez and arrived at Scripps at 5:13 p.m.

After surgery was performed, officials say Ortega-Rodriguez was pronounced dead shortly after 10 p.m.

Dr. Christopher I. Swalwell, a deputy county medical examiner, said the cause of Ortega-Rodri-

quez's death will be determined from laboratory tests in the next few weeks. He added the death was related to an injury from the abortion.

Swalwell said the female fetus was estimated to be 26 to 28 weeks of development. The fetus' death was from the abortion, he added.

It could not be determined if the fetus was viable at the time of the abortion, Swalwell said.

Swalwell noted that some infants born prematurely after 26 to 28 weeks of development have survived, but such instances are rare. A typical infant is born after 36 weeks of development, doctors say.

San Diego police say they are not investigating the case, which was referred to the medical board.

First licensed as a physician in California in 1975, Gandotra received his medical education in his native country, India. He also has been licensed to practice medicine in New York, Iowa and Illinois, officials say.