



Baby born alive, thrown away, in Florida abortion clinic

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TAMPA, Fla. (AP) -- Eighteen and pregnant, Sycloria Williams went to an abortion clinic outside Miami and paid \$1,200 for Dr. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique to terminate her 23-week pregnancy.

Three days later, she sat in a reclining chair, medicated to dilate her cervix and otherwise get her ready for the procedure.

Only Renelique didn't arrive in time. According to Williams and the Florida Department of Health, she went into labor and delivered a live baby girl.

What Williams and the Health Department say happened next has shocked people on both sides of the abortion debate: One of the clinic's owners, who has no medical license, cut the infant's umbilical cord. Williams says the woman placed the baby in a plastic biohazard bag and threw it out.

Police recovered the decomposing remains in a cardboard box a week later after getting anonymous tips.

"I don't care what your politics are, what your morals are, this should not be happening in our community," said Tom Pennekamp, a Miami attorney representing Williams in her lawsuit against Renelique (ren-uh-LEEK') and the clinic owners.

The state Board of Medicine is to hear Renelique's case in Tampa on Friday and determine whether to strip his license. The state attorney's homicide division is investigating, though no charges have been filed. Terry Chavez, a spokeswoman with the Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office, said this week that prosecutors were nearing a decision.

Renelique's attorney, Joseph Harrison, called the allegations at best "misguided and incomplete" in an e-mail to The Associated Press. He didn't provide details.

The case has riled the anti-abortion community, which contends the clinic's actions constitute murder.

"The baby was just treated as a piece of garbage," said Tom Brejcha, president of The Thomas More Society, a law firm that is also representing Williams. "People all over the country are just aghast."

Even those who support abortion rights are concerned about the allegations.

"It really disturbed me," said Joanne Sterner, president of the Broward County chapter of the National Organization for Women, after reviewing the administrative complaint against Renelique. "I know that there are clinics out there like this. And I hope that we can keep (women) from going to these types of clinics."

According to state records, Renelique received his medical training at the State University of Haiti. In 1991, he completed a four-year residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Interfaith Medical Center in

New York.

New York records show that Renelique has made at least five medical malpractice payments in the past decade, the circumstances of which were not detailed in the filings.

Several attempts to reach Renelique were unsuccessful. Some of his office numbers were disconnected, no home number could be found and he did not return messages left with his attorney.

Williams struggled with the decision to have an abortion, Pennekamp said. She declined an interview request made through him.

She concluded she didn't have the resources or maturity to raise a child, he said, and went to the Miramar Women's Center on July 17, 2006. Sonograms indicated she was 23 weeks pregnant, according to the Department of Health. She met Renelique at a second clinic two days later.

Renelique gave Williams laminaria, a drug that dilates the cervix, and prescribed three other medications, according to the administrative complaint filed by the Health Department. She was told to go to yet another clinic, A Gyn Diagnostic Center in Hialeah, where the procedure would be performed the next day, on July 20, 2006.

Williams arrived in the morning and was given more medication.

The Department of Health account continues as follows: Just before noon she began to feel ill. The clinic contacted Renelique. Two hours later, he still hadn't shown up. Williams went into labor and delivered the baby.

"She came face to face with a human being," Pennekamp said. "And that changed everything."

The complaint says one of the clinic owners, Belkis Gonzalez came in and cut the umbilical cord with scissors, then placed the baby in a plastic bag, and the bag in a trash can.

Williams' lawsuit offers a cruder account: She says Gonzalez knocked the baby off the recliner chair where she had given birth, onto the floor. The baby's umbilical cord was not clamped, allowing her to bleed out. Gonzalez scooped the baby, placenta and afterbirth into a red plastic biohazard bag and threw it out.

No working telephone number could be found for Gonzalez, and an attorney who has represented the clinic in the past did not return a message.

At 23 weeks, an otherwise healthy fetus would have a slim but legitimate chance of survival. Quadruplets born at 23 weeks last year at The Nebraska Medical Center survived.

An autopsy determined Williams' baby -- she named her Shanice -- had filled her lungs with air, meaning she had been born alive, according to the Department of Health. The cause of death was listed as extreme prematurity.

The Department of Health believes Renelique committed malpractice by failing to ensure that licensed personnel would be present when Williams was there, among other missteps.

The department wants the Board of Medicine, a separate agency, to permanently revoke Renelique's

license, among other penalties. His license is currently restricted, permitting him to only perform abortions when another licensed physician is present and can review his medical records.

Should prosecutors file murder charges, they'd have to prove the baby was born alive, said Robert Batey, a professor of criminal law at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport. The defense might contend that the child would have died anyway, but most courts would not allow that argument, he said.

"Hastening the death of an individual who is terminally ill is still considered causing the death of that individual," Batey said. "And I think a court would rule similarly in this type of case."

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