

Abortion in the US after Legalization

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Overview

1. How did American medicine respond to the *Roe v Wade* decision in 1973?
2. How did American society as a whole respond to *Roe v Wade*?

Abortion in America—a Timeline

17th to
mid-19th
century

Abortion largely unregulated

Mid-19th to late
19th century

AMA leads campaign to criminalize—only authorized abortions to be decided by physicians

1873-1973

"Century of criminalization"—much illegal abortion, performed by providers of varying skill levels and motivations; many deaths and injuries

1973

Roe v Wade; emergence of backlash—in Congress, in the streets

1993

David Gunn, M.D. is the first of 8 in ab-providing community in U.S. to be murdered

1994

Congress passes Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (Face Act)

2007

Supreme Court upholds Congressional ban of an abortion technique, Intact D & E, *Gonzales v Carhart*

What *Didn't* Happen after *Roe*

- Many hospitals did not establish abortion clinics
- Abortion training did not immediately become a mandated part of routine part of ob/gyn training
 - in 1995, this changed, but U.S. Congress interfered
- As a result, abortion care began to be largely delivered in freestanding clinics
 - excellent safety record, but intensified the marginalization of abortion provision from rest of medicine

Role of Mainstream Medicine

Why has mainstream medicine kept its distance from abortion provision?

- The lasting legacy of unsafe providers
- Dislike of controversy
- Fear of violence and intimidation

The Growth of the Anti-abortion Movement

1980—election of Ronald Reagan to presidency

- Abortion becomes “litmus test” for key governmental positions, including Supreme Court Justices and top health care positions
- Opposition to abortion becomes non-negotiable issue for Republican party candidates
- Polarization around abortion reflected not just in politics, but in popular culture, e.g. television and movies
- Opposition to abortion in conservative circles spreads to contraception as well

Abortion Rights Forces Within Medicine Push Back!



Pro-choice Medical Organizations

1991—Fellowship in Family Planning and Abortion

1992—Physicians for Reproductive Health

1993—Medical Students for Choice

1996—Clinicians for Choice/Nurses for Choice

1999—Ryan Residency Program

2003—Law Students for Reproductive Justice

2005—Society for Family Planning

Support for Abortion Providers (Finally!) from Elsewhere in Medicine

“Physicians, both as individuals and as a profession, should stand with their patients. They should make it clear that they will not perform procedures, such as ultrasound examinations, unless they are medically indicated and desired by their patients. And they should refuse to provide inaccurate information about the consequences of abortion, or to follow any other prepared script in counseling their patients, particularly when it involves treating women like children.

Such acts of civil disobedience by individual doctors should be only the starting point. ***The profession as a whole, as represented by its professional organizations, needs to become involved, so that physicians are not left to fend for themselves.***”

Where does the abortion issue stand today?

- A majority of Americans support legal abortion in at least some circumstances. Nevertheless....
- State legislatures in “red” states pass numerous restrictions that make access to abortion very difficult for the most vulnerable women
 - young women, rural women, poor women (mainly women of color)
- A growing backlash against the anti-abortion movement, and against its attacks on contraception

Pro-choice Supporters in Texas Capitol, Spring 2013

