



Crisis Pregnancy Centers

What is a Crisis Pregnancy Center?

Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) exist to keep women from having abortions. In many instances, they misinform and intimidate women to achieve their goal. Women describe being harassed, bullied, and given blatantly false information. Many assert that their confidentiality has been violated, and that mistreatment by CPCs has threatened their health.

Today there are as many as 4,000 CPCs in the United States,¹ compared to the 2,000 clinics that provide abortion care for women.² CPCs also are prevalent throughout Canada, with more than 150 centers in the country.³

By and large, CPCs are not medical facilities, and most CPC volunteers who work directly with women are not medical professionals.⁴ Their main qualifications are a commitment to Christianity and anti-choice beliefs. Although CPCs historically have not employed medical staff, there is an emerging trend on the part of CPCs to gain validity by hiring part-time anti-choice medical professionals and purchasing ultrasound equipment.⁵

How Do CPCs mislead women?

CPCs have a long history of deception. For example, some CPCs intentionally choose their name to mislead women into believing that they offer a wide range of services, including family planning and abortion care. In a 1989 report, the Family Research Council showed that women faced with an unplanned pregnancy were most likely to look in the Yellow Pages under the words “Pregnancy,” “Medical,” “Women’s Centers” and “Clinics.”⁶ Accordingly, CPCs often are advertised under these categories, as well as “Abortion Alternatives,” and “Women’s Organizations.”⁷ CPCs also advertise through posters, signs, and billboards that contain messages like, “Free Pregnancy Test,” or “Pregnant? Scared? We Can Help! Call 1-800 #.”⁸ Women report, however, that when they call these numbers the CPC representatives evade questions about whether they provide abortions, and urge the women to make an appointment to meet with a ‘counselor’ to talk in person.⁹

CPCs’ deceptive tactics extend to their physical appearance as well. CPCs often design their facilities to look like actual health care facilities with a waiting room, a partitioned check-

in desk, and an ultrasound machine.¹⁰ They typically locate themselves near clinics that offer abortions in a deliberate attempt to increase their legitimacy and lure potential patients away from receiving abortion care by capitalizing on patients’ confusion.¹¹

Though CPCs portray themselves as medical clinics, advertising medical services including an “Ask the Doctor” section and urging women to come in for “options counseling,” they do not provide full options counseling and generally will not refer for abortion care or birth control.¹² In fact, Care Net, the largest network of CPCs in the United States, specifically instructs its CPCs not to give out information about birth control.¹³ Most do not mention anywhere on their websites that the CPC will not provide or make referrals for abortions or birth control, but instead claim to provide a “nonjudgmental environment” where “each option” can be explored.¹⁴

How do CPCs target women?

CPCs often direct outreach towards young and low-income women. They offer free pregnancy tests, locate themselves in close proximity to colleges and universities, and advertise in school newspapers.¹⁵ Low-income women are particularly vulnerable because nationwide there is a shortage of clinics that offer full options counseling and abortion care.

The Family Research Council encourages CPCs to target individuals or groups a pregnant woman is most likely to consult, primarily mothers and other family members.¹⁶ CPCs are encouraged to target families and advise them of what to do if there is an unplanned pregnancy. Additionally, the Family Research Council found that 40 percent of women turn to their doctors and that intentional marketing to the medical community could significantly increase clientele.¹⁷

Do CPCs have religious affiliations?

Many CPCs are connected with religious organizations, but few disclose that fact in their advertising.¹⁸ Most CPCs do not initially disclose to women that they are driven by a religious agenda and that they oppose abortion and birth control. CPCs offer their “services” to women of all faiths, but their programs are often driven by extreme religious anti-abortion agendas. In some of their literature CPCs discuss religious messages about abortion and quote biblical passages that they claim show that God does not support abortion.¹⁹

What happens at a CPC?

CPCs have used tactics intended to delay and even harass or intimidate women from having abortions. For example, CPCs have been known to extend the waiting period for pregnancy test results to expose women to their

anti-choice or religious propaganda. While women wait, CPCs often present them with videos and pictures depicting gruesome and graphic images of bloody and dismembered fetuses that have allegedly been aborted as a scare tactic in their effort to compel women not to have abortions.²⁰

When the pregnancy results are revealed they may be presented in ways that are ambiguous²¹ or even false.²² Women also have received unwanted calls at their homes from CPCs urging them to not have an abortion following a visit, a clear violation of their privacy.²³

What kinds of misinformation do CPCs give women?

Although many CPCs claim to provide options counseling both over the phone and in person,²⁴ in reality they do not provide women with information about their full reproductive health options. For example, women are told that some birth control methods, especially emergency contraception (also known as the morning after pill), are actually abortifacients.²⁵

CPCs mislead women about abortion procedures. Women are told that abortions are painful, life-threatening procedures that will leave them with long-term emotional, physical, and psychological damage.²⁶ They are often told that having an abortion will put them at higher risk for developing breast cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder, infertility, and other serious medical conditions.²⁷

Where can women turn for accurate information and referrals for services?

The National Abortion Federation's toll-free Hotline (1-800-772-9100) offers women unbiased, factual information about pregnancy and abortion in English, Spanish and French. The Hotline also provides referrals to high-quality health care providers in the United States and Canada.

Has legal action been taken against CPCs?

Yes. CPCs have been sued using a number of different legal causes of action. For example, attorneys have successfully challenged CPCs' use of public funds under the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. Plaintiffs have also been successful in requiring CPCs to change some of their deceptive advertising tactics in states such as New York, California, Ohio, Missouri, and North Dakota.²⁸

State Attorney Generals have also pursued legal action. In 2002, for example, the New York Attorney General reached a settlement with some CPCs requiring that they clearly disclose that they do not provide or make referrals for abortion or birth control; disclose verbally and in writing before providing a test and/or counseling about

pregnancy that the center is not a licensed medical provider qualified to diagnose or accurately date pregnancy and inform the woman that only a licensed medical provider can confirm a pregnancy and provide medical advice about pregnancy; clarify in advertising and consumer contacts that the pregnancy tests it provides are self-administered; and tell people who call or visit the center that it is not a medical facility.²⁹

What else can be done to stop CPCs?

Individuals can fight bills or initiatives that fund CPCs by providing testimony about their danger and/or unconstitutionality. Elected officials also can be educated through letters, emails, faxes, phone calls, and visits from their constituents and other concerned citizens. It is also important to convey support for affirmative bills that are based on medically accurate information and serve to keep abortion safe, legal, and accessible.

Women who have had first-hand experience with CPCs are encouraged to report and document their encounters. One way to share a story is to participate in the National Abortion Federation's Patient Partnership. These stories of actual encounters help tell the truth about CPCs, and can be effective in educating the media and policy makers.

Residents can check their local Yellow Pages to see if CPCs in their area are involved with false or deceptive advertising, such as listing themselves under abortion services or abortion. In the event that they are using such tactics, the Yellow Pages, the Better Business Bureau, and other local organizations supporting the CPCs should be contacted and a change in listing should be requested.

Individuals can also take part in public education campaigns about CPCs. This work could include submitting opinion pieces or letters to the editor, making informative posters, distributing brochures, coordinating discussion sessions, or hosting a forum on CPCs. If you are interested in finding out more about any of these activities, please contact NAF at 202-667-5881 or via email at naf@prochoice.org.

References:

¹ Ziba Kashef, *The Fetal Position*, Mother Jones, January/February 2003 (available at http://www.motherjones.com/news/outfront/2003/02/ma_218_01.html).

² Lawrence B. Finer and Stanley K. Henshaw, *Abortion Incidence and Services in the United States in 2000*, The Alan

Guttmacher Institute, Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2003, 35(1): 6-15.

³ See LifeSite website (available at <http://www.lifesite.net>, list updated September 2005).

⁴ See Care Net Administrative Manual job qualifications (requiring Christian beliefs, but not medical background) and sample organizational chart (all counselors are volunteers).

⁵ Barbara Solow, *Medicine or Ministry*, Independent Online, June 18, 2003 (available at <http://indyweek.com/durham/2003-06-18/cover.html>).

⁶ Curtis J. Young, *Turning Hearts Toward Life: Market Research for Crisis Pregnancy Centers*, Family Research Council, 1998, p. 9.

⁷ See, e.g., LegalCare: Advice and Education for Pregnancy Centers from Care Net, *Your Key to Advertising in the Yellow Pages*, November 1993.

⁸ See, e.g., Care Net's website (available at <http://www.care-net.org>).

⁹ See Deb Berry, *Choose Lies*, Orlando Weekly, April 17, 2003.

¹⁰ Solow, *supra* note v.

¹¹ See Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers Moving to Expand Services, Seeking Government Funding*, February 19, 2002; see also Alan Cooper, *Abortion Battle: Prenatal Care or Pressure Tactics?* The Washington Post, February 21, 2002, A01.

¹² See, e.g., Rockville Pregnancy Center website (available at <http://www.rcpc.org>); Care Net website (available at <http://www.care-net.org>); Expectant Mother Care website (available at http://www.expectantmothercare.org/pro_life_chapel.html).

¹³ See Care Net Training Manual.

¹⁴ Maryland's Rockville Pregnancy Center website (available at <http://www.rcpc.org>).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Saint Ignatius of Antioch Catholic Church website (available at <http://www.st.ignatius.net/annivpreg.html>); Karen Hauptman and Katie Kaplan, *Crisis Pregnancy Center Misleads Teenagers*, Black and White Online, December 21, 2001.

¹⁶ Young, *supra* note vi at 13.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.* at 4.

¹⁹ Focus on the Family's "What Does God Say About Abortion" can be found at Care Net facilities like the Rockville Pregnancy Center.

²⁰ See Women's Health Action and Mobilization, *Fake Clinics: A Public Health Hazard*, Brooklyn Pro-Choice Network (available at <http://www.echonyc.com/~bpcn/fakeclinic.html>); Backwash.com (available at <http://www.backwash.com/previewnewsarchive.php?newsid=565>).

²¹ *Testimony of Mark Salo Before the Subcommittee on Regulations, Business Opportunities, and Energy of the House Committee on Small Business*, 102nd Congress, September 20, 1991.

²² Center for Reproductive Rights, *Special Report: Crisis Pregnancy Centers Seek Public Funds and Legitimacy*, Reproductive News, Volume XI No. 7/8, July/August 2002.

²³ Information from NAF CPC Patient Partnership Participants; see also Solow, *supra* note 8.

²⁴ See Care Net's website (available at <http://www.care-net.org/initiatives/ol.html>) promoting its OptionLine; see also Rockville Pregnancy Center's website advertising compassionate, non-judgmental counseling about each option (available at <http://www.rcpc.org>).

²⁵ Heritage House's *The Morning After Pill: Get the Facts*, which was given to one of NAF's CPC Patient Partnership Participants at the Rockville Pregnancy Center; see also OptionLine website (available at <http://www.optionline.org/>); *refuted by* The Alan Guttmacher Institute's *Emergency Contraception* (available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/media/supp/ec121702.html>) stating that emergency contraception will prevent a pregnancy from occurring but will not abort an established pregnancy.

²⁶ See, e.g., *Health and Safety Checklist*, Rockville Pregnancy Center (available at <http://www.rcpc.org/checklist.html>).

²⁷ See, e.g., Westside Pregnancy Resource Center website (available at <http://www.wprc.org/abortion.phtml>); OptionLine website (available at <http://www.pregnancycenters.org/abortion.html>); Berry, *supra* note 2.

²⁸ See NAF Report, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers: An Affront to Choice* (2006).

²⁹ Vitoria Lin and Cynthia Dailard, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers Seek to Increase Political Clout, Secure Government Subsidy*, The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, May 2002, Vol. 5, No. 2 (available at <http://guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/gr050204.html>).

For More Information

For information or referrals to qualified abortion providers, call the National Abortion Federation's toll-free hotline: 1-800-772-9100.

Weekdays: 8:00A.M.- 9:00P.M.

Saturdays: 9:00A.M. - 5:00P.M. Eastern time.

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