

Doctor charged in baby deaths; Archdiocese of Philadelphia calls actions ‘abhorrent’

PHILADELPHIA - A Philadelphia doctor who routinely performed illegal late-term abortions for more than 30 years was charged in the death of a female patient and accused of murdering seven babies born alive in his squalid health clinic.

A grand jury indicted Kermit B. Gosnell and nine associates Jan. 19 on dozens of charges in connection with the deaths of Karnamaya Mongar, 41, of Woodbridge, Va., and the newborn infants. The indictment said the babies were killed when their spinal cords were severed with scissors.

News of the practices in Gosnell’s West Philadelphia Women’s Medical Society prompted the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to offer “fervent prayers” for the victims, their families and all touched by “these heinous practices.”

“The repeated actions of Dr. Gosnell and his staff were abhorrent and intrinsically evil in their disregard for the lives of the unborn and the welfare of the women who sought their services,” the archdiocese said in a statement.

“We are prepared to assist with support services for the women who suffered these abortions and stand ready to provide proper burial at the appropriate time for the aborted babies,” the statement added.

At a news conference announcing the charges, District Attorney Seth Williams said the babies were born alive and viable.

Williams also said it was likely that hundreds of other babies died at the clinic between its opening in 1979 and February 2010, when federal agents served warrants at the location and Gosnell's home in the Mantua neighborhood of West Philadelphia. He said evidence surrounding other likely deaths was missing, however.

The warrants were issued in connection with the illegal sale of prescriptions for Oxycontin to people never examined by Gosnell.

In the raid, FBI agents and detectives from the district attorney's office discovered jars filled with severed baby feet lining the walls; containers, ranging from milk jugs to cat food receptacles, and bags containing aborted fetuses scattered throughout the clinic and bloodstained and urine-stained furniture and floors, Williams said.

Onsite staff members also were found to be unlicensed, he said.

Authorities learned of Mongar's November 2009 death from a staffer during their investigation, the grand jury said in a 260-page report summarizing a yearlong investigation. Further investigation revealed that Mongar died from an overdose of anesthetics prescribed by Gosnell, according to the report.

The grand jury called the clinic a "baby charnel house."

The report contained vivid descriptions of procedures and graphic photos of dead infants.

It said the infant deaths involved children from 24 to 32 weeks gestation. Under Pennsylvania law, one of the strictest in the nation, abortions past 24 weeks gestation are illegal. Most clinics decline to perform abortions past 12 weeks.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Gosnell was well known for being willing to

handle abortions for women whose pregnancies had surpassed 12 weeks and for treating poor and minority women.

Agents described the facility as “filthy,” “deplorable,” “disgusting” and “very unsanitary, very outdated, horrendous,” the report said.

“There was blood on the floor. A stench of urine filled the air. A flea-infested cat was wandering through the facility, and there were cat feces on the stairs. Semi-conscious women scheduled for abortions were moaning in the waiting room or the recovery room, where they sat on dirty recliners covered with blood-stained blankets,” the report said.

Staff members face a slew of charges including murder, performing illegal abortions, conspiracy, racketeering, hindering prosecution, record tampering, obstructing justice, theft by deception, perjury and false testimony, and corruption of a minor.

Those indicted include Gosnell’s wife, Pearl, 49; Elizabeth Hampton, 51, Tina Baldwin, 45, and Maddline Joe, 53, all of Philadelphia; Lynda Williams, 42, of Wilmington, Del., Sherry West, 51, of Newark, Del.; Adrienne Moton, 33, of Upper Darby, Pa.; Steve Massof, 48, of Pittsburgh; and Eileen O’Neill, 54, of Phoenixville, Pa.

The grand jury also devoted a large part of its report to questioning how the workings of the Women’s Health Society could go undetected for so long and said that state and local agencies failed in their oversight and licensing duties.

“In the absence of any regulatory oversight, Gosnell recklessly cut corners, allowed patients to choose their medication based on ability to pay, and provided abysmal care - all to maximize his profit,” the grand jury said.

Jurors offered 15 recommendations for state and local governments to consider

including legislative changes governing the statute of limitations for infanticide and illegal abortions as well as rules changes for agencies governing the work of abortion clinics and law enforcement agencies involving the investigation of suspicious deaths.

The full grand jury report can be read at online at www.phila.gov/districtattorney/PDFs/GrandJuryWomensMedical.pdf.