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.”

Angell and Greene, “Where are the doctors?” USA Today, May 12, 2012.
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