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Abortions handled at Center

By Philene Gotsis

Last year, eighty-eight Northwestern women became pregnant and of those, 75 decided to have an abortion according to statistics from Searle Health Service.

Like many college-age women around the country, most NU women who decided to terminate their pregnancy do so because of career plans or a priority for finishing school.

"Most students say they're not ready to take on the responsibility of having a child," said Johanna Sholder, head nurse at Searle's gynecology department. "Usually they have a career in mind, and they don't want to get married right away. The boyfriend usually supports that decision. Most feel that it's just an unlucky thing that happened to them," she said.

HELPING STUDENTS EXPLORE their options when an "unlucky" pregnancy occurs is one of the responsibilities of her department, Sholder said.

The department provides pregnancy tests, counseling about birth control, information about abortion and alternative courses of action, and emotional support while the student decides whether or not to have an abortion.

Searle does not handle the abortion procedure, Sholder said, but it will refer women to abortion facilities.

One of those facilities is Chicago's most comprehensive women's medical center, the Albany Women's Medical Center at 5086 N. Elston Avenue.

ACCORDING TO ELAINE Levy, director of community relations at Albany, advanced surgical techniques have now made the risk of death by abortion seven times less than the risk of death by child bearing.

Levy said most of the center's patients are from 18 to 20 years old. The center is frequented by college women, including a number of NU students. Levy said the age of the women who use the facility ranges from 14 to 50.

Women come to the center, Levy said, because it offers health services at lower prices than they can get elsewhere. Abortions with a local anesthetic cost \$220 she said. This

cost is covered by NU's insurance plan.

While many women who come to Albany want abortions, Levy said that is not the only service provided.

THE ALBANY CENTER specializes in services for women, providing birth control information and devices, pregnancy and venereal disease testing, breast examinations, tubal ligations as well as first trimester abortions. The staff includes seven gynecologists, three female internists, one nurse clinician, one registered nurse and 11 counselors.

Tubal ligation, a 20-minute sterilization procedure where the fallopian tubes are severed, is a relatively new but increasingly popular service at the center, Levy said. Because its effects are irreversible, approval of this procedure used to require that the woman already have had children, as well as requiring the husband's written consent and an appearance before a hospital committee. Now, however, a woman needs only her own consent for the \$800 surgery.

"More career women and those with an established family are choosing tubal ligations. But sterilization is not encouraged in the very young," Levy said.

No matter what the service is, at Albany, counseling is a major part of it.

WHEN A PATIENT comes into the clinic Levy said she is never left alone and is encouraged to be as relaxed as possible. Both private and group counseling sessions are provided before any of the services are offered.

"We encourage patients to bring a friend with them. We are catering to the needs of women, but want the men to be involved as well," said Levy.

"Education is vital. Only when the patient is made an integral part of her health care can she make an informed decision. The medical and emotional needs of women go hand in hand," Levy said.

A step-by-step explanation of the entire abortion procedure, other possible alternatives, as well as birth control methods are discussed in detail before the actual abortion.

THE ABORTION appointment takes about three hours on weekdays and from four to five hours on Saturdays. The actual abortion process, called vacuum aspiration, takes from five to seven minutes, and is followed by 30 minutes to one hour of recovery time. The rest of the time is spent in counseling and lab tests. A follow-up appointment takes place in two weeks, Levy and Sholder said.

Women's reactions to finding out they are pregnant vary from a calm acceptance to a very emotional response and tears, Sholder said. Most women feel relief after the abortion, but some experience depression and are encouraged to call the center at any time for counseling.

Strong emotions are involved in a pregnancy and abortion, Levy said. She said many women feel guilty. Both Sholder and the center's administrator added that the emotional response to an abortion is an individual matter; some women have few problems, while others may take years before they can deal with it emotionally.

"I FEEL THE issue of the Human Life Amendment is a personal choice for a woman to make. It's up to her if she wants to terminate. My body and what I want to do with it should be my decision," she said.