

HEALING

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HEALING Doctors and Abortion

By Doctor Tandavan My over forty years of medical practice has been a great joy. All of these years were in affiliation with a Roman Catholic hospital. The last issue of the Hinduism Today on abortion brings to mind several events in my professional life that may be helpful to the Hindu physician in his review of his own religious and philosophical ideas concerning the ethics of abortion. Abortions are not performed in Catholic hospitals, because the act is considered a sin against God. It is always wrong to take another's life at any stage of development. This is unequivocal and not open to any interpretation or discussion. Each member of the medical staff agrees to abide by these rules. The vast majority of the doctors believed wholeheartedly in these rules. However, that is not to say that some doctors did not take their patients to non-Catholic hospitals to have abortions. One colleague, when quizzed about his taking his abortion patients to another hospital, said that he must give his patients what they wanted otherwise they would leave him for another practitioner. His morality was affected by his financial well being. This is the exception rather than the rule. A physician, of course, cannot force his moral code upon his patients, although he may give strong advice to accept his. He must also make it clear to the patient what his ethical position truly is. Before abortions became legal only very rarely were hysterectomies performed on gravid (pregnant) patients. This would prompt a very quick review by the medical staff committee on standards and was often responsible for the physician's prompt dismissal from the staff or loss of surgical privileges. Another incident of a married doctor's girl friend becoming pregnant with his child comes to mind. She was sent by him to another institution for an abortion performed by another physician (it was truly her choice to abort). He personally would not perform an abortion but when pushed to the wall he agreed to one. Another female physician went elsewhere for an abortion because the child was unexpected, she no longer loved the father, and it would "be very awkward to have another child at this time." The examples that come to mind are all evidence of selfishness and self indulgence as the reason for abortion. In more recent years the most numerous requests for abortions are by unmarried teenagers. Many of these are being performed by charity clinics without parental approval. Those that are pro choice suggest that the fetus is not truly alive until a certain time late in the period of development; and that the business of destroying life is overrated. It is true that the fetus cannot independently sustain life outside of the womb until later in its development; but this does not mean that life does not exist. The sperm is a living "half" cell; the egg is a living "half" cell and as they combine

they produce a living whole cell that is able to develop and grow into a human being from the joining of the two cells. This fetus is then able to accept a human soul in order that its dharma can be completed. Life exists at all times, and it seems to me that we must conclude that abortion is destroying life at whatever stage it is performed. Dr. Devananda Tandavan, MD, is a member of the American Medical Association, the International College of Surgeons, the Society of Nuclear Medicine, the American Federation of Astrologers, the International Reiki Association-- and more. Send your questions to Hinduism Today, 1819 Second St., Concord, California, 94519 USA.