

Protests kick off new series of pro-life demonstrations

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Two demonstrations Saturday might be classified as just preliminary to what looks like an intensifying battle over the legality of abortions.

An estimated 70 people representing both pro-life and pro-choice sides lined up in front of Botsford Hospital on Grand River Avenue Saturday morning. Pro-life activists were protesting the hospital's policy of performing abortions and the alleged recent death of a Detroit woman at the hospital due to complications from one.

Later, 35 demonstrators picketed near the home of a Bloomfield Township physician who reportedly performed the abortion. The protest drew the ire of neighbors who said their privacy was being invaded.

OTHERWISE, BOTH demonstrations were relatively peaceful with no arrests made. However, with an Operation Rescue planned for Oct. 19 at area abortion clinics, things could become volatile.

"We're going to make the issue of abortion more personal," said Lynn

"Whether I stand with you or against you, you have no business doing this in my neighborhood. Get out of here!"

— Bloomfield Township resident

Mills, a Livonia resident and spokeswoman, representing 50 pro-life activists in front of Botsford Hospital Saturday. "We're going to step up activities against people who perform abortions."

"The abortion rights issue is going to heat up in the next month," said Eileen Scheff of Detroit, spokeswoman for Coalition to Defend Abortion Rights, which had 20 members turn out in response to the pro-life demonstration at Botsford. "This is a precursor."

PRO-LIFE AND pro-choice activists began to converge at 9:20 a.m. Both sides held up signs as traffic passed by on Grand River Avenue. No attempts were made to impede cars entering or leaving the hospital.

Mills said the main purpose was to make people aware of the death of a Detroit nurse Aug. 1 due to the complications from an "elective termination of pregnancy," which Mills said was performed at the hospital. Photocopies of the death certificate were handed out to passers-by.

Botsford Hospital spokeswoman Margo Gorchow said she is aware of the situation. "There's a degree of

risk in all surgical procedures," she said.

The doctor is a member in good standing at the hospital, Gorchow said, and no action has been taken against him because of the death.

LT. MARTIN Bledsoe of the Farmington Hills Police met with both sides at the start of the demonstration. He said both sides were cooperative.

"Every time we asked them to step from the curb or step away from the driveway, they complied," Bledsoe said.

Farmington Hills police had 12 officers on the scene with more in reserve if any trouble developed, Bledsoe said. "We didn't know what to expect."

Botsford Hospital's security force also was deployed. Gorchow said the hospital heard it was going to be the target of a picketing and planned accordingly.

Gorchow said she understood the demonstrators' constitutional right to make a statement but added, "... the business of the hospital is not to be interrupted."

PEOPLE WHO live near the doctor's home on Terence Court felt

their lives were intruded upon by the ensuing hour-long demonstration in their Bloomfield Township neighborhood.

Pro-life protesters pulled up at 1 p.m. on Woodview and began carrying placards, some depicting bloody and disfigured fetuses. Children who were playing football in a nearby yard came over to watch the proceedings.

One angry woman, who didn't want to give her name, confronted protesters and shouted at them. "You people don't belong in a private area here!"

"Whether I stand with you or against you, you have no business doing this in my neighborhood. Get out of here!"

Arthur Apkarian and his family were preparing for a wedding when protesters arrived.

"I BELIEVE in what they're saying," Apkarian said. "That's my personal belief, but I don't believe in this."

"They're carrying these pictures of these babies. I mean look at these kids, they don't need to see this," added his daughter, Lynne Apkarian.

Sgt. Pete Earp of the Bloomfield Township Police said his department didn't get word of the demonstration until 1 1/2 hours before marchers arrived.

Township ordinance states people cannot approach closer than 120 feet of private property. Protesters walked along Woodview and circled just inside of Terence Court. The protest lasted an hour.

The calm of an early Saturday afternoon in Bloomfield Township was broken with the back-and-forth marching of pro-life advocates in the residential neighborhood of a doctor they say performs abortions.

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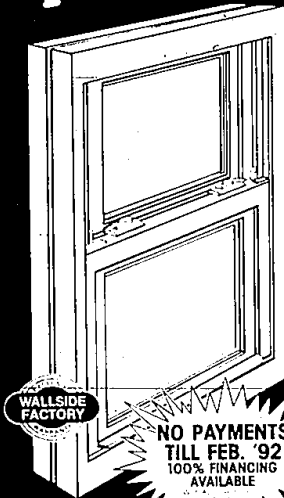
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