

Family Planning at Parkland: Hospital in best position to continue program

EDITORIAL

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If the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas is going to stop providing family planning services for low-income women, it's vital that the contract go to Parkland Memorial Hospital.

The two institutions share the same doctors, and several of the family planning clinics are housed in buildings with Parkland's community clinics. The family planning program, which counsels about 35,000 women a year, also fits Parkland's mission to improve public health, particularly among the poor.

That said, it's a shame that state legislators intent on restricting abortions keep targeting institutions that provide family planning – one aim of which is to prevent the need for abortions. That's how this situation came about. Legislators led by state Sen. Steve Ogden, R-Bryan, made it law that a hospital or clinic cannot receive public money for family planning if it also performs elective abortions.

UT Southwestern does not perform elective abortions. Neither does Parkland or either of the other two hospitals affiliated with the medical school. But school officials are worried that the state still might penalize it if, for instance, doctors at hospitals in Waco and Wichita Falls, where UT students do their residencies, perform elective abortions as part of their private practices.

Across the state, most organizations that receive state-administered family planning funds signed a document agreeing to the abortion stipulation. UT Southwestern took a more cautious approach, choosing instead to drop the family planning program.

In a best-case scenario, Parkland will assume the responsibility and get the money. Hospital officials say they can take over the program with minimal disruptions and potentially use it as a basis for expanding their ob-gyn services for the poor women they serve. That sounds great.

But in a worst-case scenario, the contract will go to an unrelated institution, with considerable disruption of services. Or the money could dry up and the services disappear altogether. If that happened, UT Southwestern estimates that Parkland would deliver an additional 3,000 babies a year. No telling how many other women would choose abortion instead.

If that happens, the state will have cut off its nose to spite its face.