

Committed to Care: Serving with Integrity

A Guide to Responding to Attacks on Pregnancy Centers

Note: This update has been excerpted in large part from Care Net's "Best Practices Update" and Heartbeat is grateful for Care Net's willingness to share this information with Heartbeat Affiliates. Some information contained in this guide was taken from "Serving Clients with Care and Integrity: A Step-by-Step Guide for Responding to NARAL's CPC Campaign."

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Introduction

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.”
(I Corinthians 16:13-14)

Heartbeat and our centers remain under attack by the pro-abortion lobby:

2008 – Attacks pending in New Mexico, West Virginia, and New York.

March 2008 – Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate accusing pregnancy centers of deceptive advertising.

March 2008 – NARAL-driven legislation (House Bill 1146 and Senate Bill 694) to mandate a disclaimer for pregnancy centers was introduced in the Maryland General Assembly by Senator Rich Madaleno and Delegate Roger Manno.

January 2008 –Maryland NARAL released a report accusing pregnancy centers of providing false and misleading information to women considering abortion.

March 2007 – Oregon state government considered legislation drafted by NARAL and Planned Parenthood that called for a statewide investigation of pregnancy centers and the establishment of a toll-free number to anonymously lodge complaints against the good work of pregnancy centers.

July 2006 – Representative Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), an avid abortion proponent, issued a report accusing pregnancy centers of providing inaccurate health information on the risks of abortion.

July 2006 – NARAL launched attacks on pregnancy centers in North Carolina issuing a report entitled “Choosing Lies and Deception: Crisis Pregnancy Centers in North Carolina”.

March 2006 – Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives accusing pregnancy centers of deceptive advertising.

December 2005 – NARAL in Texas released a report entitled “Pregnancy Centers: A Hidden Threat to Women’s Health”.

These attacks are not new. For decades, abortion proponents have accused pregnancy centers of engaging in deception. However, the attacks have heightened since pregnancy centers began receiving federal funds through capacity building grants and abstinence education grants. The capacity building grants have been awarded to a small number of pregnancy centers to equip them to offer medical services. A portion of these funds compete with government funds issued to abortion providers in urban areas.

Subsequently, abortion advocates are taking their pregnancy center smear campaign to Capitol Hill. The intensified campaign against pregnancy centers is based upon the growing national recognition and credibility of pregnancy centers nationwide, which is a threat to abortion advocates.

In this barrage of current attacks, there are three primary areas abortion advocates are attacking pregnancy centers. The allegations include pregnancy centers offering misleading information on: an increased risk for breast cancer following an abortion, infertility in women associated with a past abortion, and women experiencing mental health issues after an abortion.

In light of these attacks, it is strongly recommended that only phone counselors who have completed extended pregnancy center volunteer training, and have had an assessment of their skills conducted following the training, be approved as phone consultants to answer incoming calls at a pregnancy center. The majority of accusations of presenting false information to clients made by NARAL and other abortion proponents have been based on recorded phone conversations between volunteer phone consultants and fake clients.

If your center is reinforcing good pregnancy center practices, there is no reason to have concern. It is imperative that all your transactions with clients be undertaken with care and integrity. This handout is developed for your benefit and to assist you in securing excellence on every level of center operations.

When Nehemiah rebuilt the wall in Jerusalem, great opposition occurred (Nehemiah 4:1-23). Nehemiah sought refuge in the Lord and advised the people:

The work of the Lord is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us! (Nehemiah 4:19-20)

Following the example of Nehemiah, the leaders in your pregnancy centers must assume the dual roles of workers and guards. Each center must continue its work serving clients while, at the same time, seeking the Lord's help in guarding against attacks. Our response is guided by godly principles, not by a spirit of fear. God is faithful to defend us.

Reinforcing Good Pregnancy Center Practices

1. Adopt, enforce, and display *Our Commitment of Care*.

Most of the attacks from abortion proponents are based upon the false premise that most pregnancy centers are committed to deceiving, intimidating, and coercing clients. The national document, *Our Commitment of Care*, was adopted by several national affiliation organizations in 2000 to promote basic principles of care and integrity for all pregnancy centers. You may find this document on the Heartbeat website under “Affiliation.” Please feel free to download and print this from your computer.

The principles set forth in *Our Commitment of Care* address many issues abortion proponents raise in attacking pregnancy centers. All pregnancy centers are encouraged to adopt, enforce and display *Our Commitment of Care*. By hanging this document in your center’s waiting room, you will convey to your clients and the community your high standards of care and professionalism, and humanitarian standards by which your center abides.

2. Audit center advertising practices.

- *Ensure that your center has adopted written policies that reflect your center’s commitment to truthful advertising practices.*
- *Ensure your center’s ads are listed under appropriate Yellow Page headings.*
The most common and best headings are “Abortion Alternatives” or “Pregnancy Counseling”. Your center should not list under the headings “Abortion Providers” or “Abortion Services”. A pregnancy center that does not offer medical services should avoid listing under the heading “Clinics”.
- *Ensure all language used in your advertising, especially any language related to abortion, accurately describes the services your center offers.*
It is recommended that you have a local attorney review your advertising in advance.
- *Ensure that your center has liability insurance protection that covers false advertising.*
Insurance you may consider is Spirit Mountain. They can be reached at www.patriot-insurance.com, or call 1-800-859-2724 for more information.

3. Audit phone practices.

Allegations from NARAL and those made in the Waxman report were based on phone investigations of pregnancy centers conducted by abortion proponents posing as “fake clients.” The goals of these investigations were to record and document so-called incidences of “deceptive practices”. There are several steps your center may take to protect against these tactics in the future.

- *Ensure your pregnancy center phone volunteers have adequate training*

It is strongly recommended that every phone volunteer complete the pregnancy center's volunteer training and then an assessment of her phone skills be evaluated before she is placed on the pregnancy center phones. Keep in mind your phone volunteer is almost always the first point of contact a potential client may have with your center. Therefore, it is vital every phone volunteer be professional, courteous, and well-trained in order to provide accurate information to the caller.

- *Assure up-to-date, adequate information for callers is kept near the phone*
A useful tool for the pregnancy center phone volunteer to use when speaking to women about abortion, the morning after pill, or RU-486 is *Talking about Abortion*. The manual includes easy-to-find information regarding physical complications to abortions, psychological complications, abortion procedures, fetal development, and other topics your phone consultants may need to address with clients. You can order this from Heartbeat at 1-888-550-7577.

All information should be medically accurate, approved by a qualified physician, and from a credible source. Information and resources given to clients regarding abortion, the morning after pill, and post-abortion trauma should be reviewed and approved by a qualified physician or medical professional before volunteers have access to them or they are distributed to clients.

- *Ensure that all callers who inquire about the availability of abortion services are advised that the center does not offer such services.*
For example, the following is one response that could be used when a question about abortion services or referrals is raised:

Our center offers information about abortion and other help for pregnant women. Our center does not perform abortions or refer for them. Have you had a pregnancy test?

- *Ensure that your center has adopted written policies reflecting its commitment to providing accurate information to all callers.*

4. Include clear descriptions and disclaimers about your center services.

Abortion proponents wrongly claim that pregnancy centers want to deceive clients about the nature of their services and especially the availability of abortion services. To guard against such claims, your center should adopt procedures to ensure that all clients are provided clear and accurate information about services offered by the center. Before services are provided, be certain that your clients are made aware that your peer counselors are not professional counselors and that your center is not a medical facility (if it is not). The following is one example of a statement you can use to accomplish this:

We are a crisis intervention agency providing free pregnancy tests, peer consultation, and practical help. The consultation provided is not intended as a substitute for professional counseling, medical, or pre-natal care.

One way to address the allegations of deception about abortion services is to include language in your center's client service form explaining that your center does not offer abortion services or referrals. For example, this could be accomplished by including the following disclaimer:

THIS CENTER OFFERS INFORMATION ABOUT ABORTION PROCEDURES AND RISKS. THIS CENTER DOES NOT OFFER ABORTION SERVICES OR ABORTION REFERRALS.

Each client should be given the opportunity to review the form and invited to ask any questions she may have. Having the appropriate forms and disclaimers will reduce your center's liability and guard against possible accusations.

5. Audit abortion education practices.

Abortion proponents are intent on uncovering incidents in which pregnancy centers have provided inaccurate abortion information to clients, subjected them to intimidation, or used scare tactics. The credibility of your work directly depends on maintaining abortion education practices that are consistent with the highest levels of integrity and care.

- *Ensure your center has adopted written policies that reflect its commitment to appropriate abortion education practices.*
- *Ensure all abortion information is medically accurate.*
Specific representations about abortion complications, risks, and post-abortion trauma should be properly supported by sources generally recognized and accepted in the medical community (CDC, NIH, peer-reviewed academic journals, etc.).
- *Ensure all abortion materials are shared with the client in an objective manner.*
- *Ensure all abortion education videos are medically accurate, content appropriate, and used with great sensitivity.*
When using abortion education videos, ensure that the client is properly advised of the nature of the video's content, ensure that the client signs a disclaimer or gives written consent to view the video after being advised that the presentation is optional, and assure that the client is given the opportunity to stop and leave the presentation at any time.
- *Ensure that procedures are in place to allow for regular written feedback, including any compliments or concerns, relating to their interactions at the center.*
- *Ensure all peer counselors and phone consultants receive regular training and supervision to assure that their presentation of abortion information and materials is medically accurate and appropriate.*

- *Ensure that your pregnancy center has liability insurance coverage that covers counseling claims.*

6. Audit pregnancy test procedures.

Every pregnancy center should ensure that its procedures for giving pregnancy tests to clients are consistent with applicable legal requirements. There are several steps that can be taken to reinforce these practices:

- *Ensure that your center has adopted written policies that reflect your center's commitment to administering pregnancy tests in accordance with applicable legal requirements.*
- *Ensure your center properly follows the "self-testing" procedure under which clients routinely perform and read their own tests (unless your center has obtained a CLIA waiver and complies with any other applicable legal requirements to perform staff-administered tests).*
- *Ensure that all client forms relating to pregnancy tests clearly disclose that your pregnancy center is not a medical facility (unless it is a medical facility).*
- *Ensure that pregnancy tests are offered without attaching any undue conditions.*
- *Ensure your center employees and volunteers are properly trained to provide accurate information about the pregnancy tests offered at the center.*
- *Ensure that ultrasound and similar services are performed under the proper supervision of a licensed medical professional or physician in accordance with standards of medical care and in accordance with the law.*

7. Prepare to handle requests for 1023 and the 990 forms.

Abortion proponents are encouraged to seek information from pregnancy centers by requesting copies of the center's IRS forms. This tactic has been common for years. Since 1987, the IRS has required that non-profit organizations keep their original 1023 (tax exemption) applications and three most recent 990s available for public inspection.

More recently the IRS has expanded these disclosure requirements. Under the new rules, any non-profit organization receiving a written request for copies must produce them within 30 days. If the request is made in person, the documents must ordinarily be produced on the same business day. The requesting party can be required to pay copying and postal expenses as a prerequisite for obtaining the material. Each pregnancy center should keep copies of all these required documents available and ready for production at its main office.

The annual 990 return that a pregnancy center is required to file contains mostly financial information. Every pregnancy center should adopt good practices and accounting procedures.

This should include the submission of regular financial reports to the center's board. Heartbeat recommends an annual or biannual financial audit or review by an outside accountant.

8. Keep charitable registration current.

Many states require charities that solicit donations to file information comparable to that included in annual 990 returns. Although most states have these requirements, there are exemptions that may apply to your pregnancy center. For example, many states exempt religious organizations from registration. Also, in some states, charities that receive less than \$25,000 in annual revenue are exempted. Each center should check the requirements that apply in its own state.

Please note that you may be required to comply with charitable solicitation laws in other states if you solicit in those states. Reviewing your mailing list will help you to determine where your Center's solicitation letters are being sent. If you find that you need to register in more than one state, you might consider using the Unified Registration Statement (URS). A helpful Web site that lists which states accept the URS and that sets forth the laws of the various states is http://www.multistatefiling.org/n_appendix.htm#yes_urs.

9. Audit charting and other record keeping practices.

Every pregnancy center should have procedures in place to ensure that proper records are kept to reflect the center's interaction with clients. Charting of peer counseling sessions should be routinely undertaken so that there is an objective and accurate record of the interaction between the client and the peer counselor. In the event of a later dispute, these records may prove crucial in helping to sustain the center's positions. The exit interview is one of the strongest tools that a pregnancy center can use to refute unfounded claims of improper client treatment.

Through an exit interview, clients are given an opportunity to complete a standard questionnaire in which they can provide positive or negative feedback concerning their treatment by the center. The prevalence of positive exit interviews and the relative absence of negative exit interviews provide strong evidence to rebut claims that pregnancy centers engage in deception, intimidation, and other improper practices.

10. Ensure website accuracy.

With the success of keyword advertising and the growing number of Americans who use the Internet to search for information, your website will become a powerful tool for reaching clients and may often be their first point of contact with your center. As a result, it is imperative that the information on your website is entirely accurate and periodically updated. It is also important to consider that any keywords that you choose to advertise your center online *must* have corresponding information on your website. Heartbeat strongly encourages all centers to take the following into consideration when evaluating current website content and internet advertising practices:

- *Include ONLY updated, medically accurate information.*

While it is important that all content on your website be accurate and up-to-date, it is absolutely essential that sensitive information relating to abortion risks, STDs, or reproductive health be updated and medically accurate. All medical information should be periodically reviewed and updated, preferably by a medical professional, to ensure accuracy. Keep information brief and to the point; let the information speak for itself.

- *Cite ONLY medical or well-documented sources.*

It is imperative to document the medical information and statistics that you use on your website. It is equally important to use only scientifically sound data. While you may feel that a piece of information or certain statistic is compelling, it is always better to leave it out than to use undocumented information. Using and citing the following sources will best ensure accuracy:

1. Peer-reviewed academic journals
2. Governmental agencies (Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health – state, federal, etc.)
3. Medical Institute for Sexual Health (The Medical Institute uses only scientifically sound data on their website and resources. You must cite their website and/or resource when using information from them on your website.)

Though this is not an exhaustive list of medical sources, Heartbeat strongly urges centers to use these types of resources or to contact a medical professional or Heartbeat’s national office to determine the soundness of other sources. Centers are encouraged to avoid citing overtly pro-life sources or websites that are not sponsored by a medical group or publication. By citing professional, sound sources you are building your center’s credibility and protecting against accusations of inaccuracies.

- *Include disclaimers.*

Many centers have been accused of misleading clients as to the services they provide. To remain above reproach and to protect against such accusations, Heartbeat strongly encourages that your center include a disclaimer indicating that your center does not refer for or perform abortions (a good place is in either the “About Us” or “FAQ” section).

Also, when including information about fetal development on your website, a disclaimer such as: “This information is intended for general educational purposes only and should never be relied upon as a substitute for professional medical advice” should be included along with the disclaimer that the center does not provide or refer for abortions or abortifacients.

- *Ensure Keyword-Content Consistency*

The goal of reaching abortion-minded women through Internet advertising must be conditioned by the need to ensure that all such advertising is above reproach. When choosing what keywords to advertise through Google, Yahoo, or other internet search engines, it is imperative to maintain the same standards that you would when advertising in print.

In developing a Google, Yahoo, or other pay-per-click advertising campaign, your center should only bid on words and phrases that are directly relevant to the content on your website. For example, if you choose to bid on the phrase “abortion clinic,” your website should contain specific information that is relevant to this topic. Many pregnancy centers include abortion clinic health and safety checklists. Similarly, you may bid on keywords such as “morning-after pill” or “Plan B” if your website contains information about these items.

In addition to ensuring integrity in the keywords you advertise, you must also ensure that the actual ads you post on Google, Yahoo and other search engines are fully accurate and do not imply the provision of any services that your center does not actually offer. By the same token, all information on your website about pregnancy, abortion, and abortion risks should be reviewed for medical accuracy.

Public Relations and Media Strategy

For years many pregnancy centers have shied away from media attention and publicity, while abortion proponents waged an aggressive public relations campaign against the pregnancy center movement. The abortion industry continues to utilize local and national press as well as the political arena in their attempt to discredit pregnancy centers in the eyes of the American public. While the best response to such attacks continues to be your daily efforts in helping the men and women in your communities, it is also prudent for centers to develop their own public relations strategy and to pro-actively reach out to local media, elected officials, and other key leaders in order to share the important contribution that you make to your community.

Below are some practical ways that you can prepare your center to respond to and reach out to the local media as well as ways that you can foster relationships with your elected officials. By implementing a pro-active media campaign, you can help to bring attention to the good work of your center as well as to promote the importance of pregnancy centers nationwide.

1. Responding to Interview Requests:

With the increasing attacks being brought by abortion groups against pregnancy centers on both a national and local scale, your center may receive requests for interviews with local TV, radio, and print journalists. In order to prepare for such requests, you are encouraged to review the helpful tips below and to have a strategy in place for responding to these types of requests.

- Designate a media spokesperson: Your center should choose one person who will be responsible for handling media inquiries. In most cases this will be the Executive Director. This person should be comfortable doing press interviews and should be capable of making a good presentation on television, radio, or print. All other staff should be trained to forward media inquiries to this person. (**In some cases, the spokesperson may want to direct questions to another professional who works with your center, such as the Medical Director to answer questions that deal with complex medical topics. In all cases, ensure that the person being interviewed is articulate and comfortable being interviewed.)
- Respond to the media on a call-back basis: When a media inquiry is made, respond in a timely fashion but never feel pressured to give an interview immediately. Find out the reporter's contact information, publication, deadline, and any details regarding their inquiry: summary, angle being taken, target audience, and who else is being contacted about the story. Advise that you will call back after you review the request. It may also be wise to have the reporter e-mail you any specific questions they intend to ask.
- Seek appropriate guidance when the media calls: After obtaining as much information as you can about a reporter's request, you should seek advice and further information from your affiliation organization or other group that can offer assistance and give suggestions for responding to that particular topic. If your center has access to a media consultant or expert, rely on that contact for appropriate guidance. Whether the interview is going to

be on TV, radio, or in print, it is wise to have someone stage a mock interview to test your responses and determine any potential weaknesses. This mock interview could be conducted with someone over the phone or with a trusted member of your staff.

- Place limitation on your media exposure: When you agree to make yourself available for a media interview, it is prudent to place reasonable limits on the amount of time that you will give for your interview. The more time you spend talking on a particular topic the more opportunities you may give a reporter to lead you off track from your prepared response. Stick to what you have prepared and don't hesitate to let them know when the designated time is up. It is also wise to have a board member or another trusted member of your staff sit in with you while you are interviewed.
- Tape the interview: To help assure accuracy and fairness, it is appropriate to notify the reporter that you will be taping the interview for your own purposes.
- Keep a media contact list: It is wise to keep a list of the names, addresses, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers of the journalists who request interviews with your center or who you believe might be interested in covering stories that pertain to your ministry in the future. You can ascertain the names and responsibilities of those journalists in your area by simply examining your local media. Journalists and freelance writers that frequently cover social issues such as abortion and teen pregnancy or more general regional stories will be of particular interest. By keeping track of stories published by these various journalists, you can gain insights about which sources and reporters are most likely to provide fair media coverage of your center and cause.
- Client Interview: The most powerful endorsements for the good work of your center can come from the clients who have been served there; however, you should exercise caution when deciding whether a particular client should be made available for an interview. Of course, any such interview must be completely voluntary and consensual by the client.

2. Implementing a pro-active media strategy

In addition to responding to media requests, centers are encouraged to actively reach out to the media. Here are some practical ways to be pro-active in your media strategy:

- Become a source for your local media: You should seek to position yourself as a reliable media source for information concerning such issues as life, pregnancy, sexuality, and women's health. This means that you should initiate contact with the reporters with whom you wish to develop such a relationship. Seek to introduce yourself to these reporters and to keep the lines of communication open. This first step may be intimidating, but you are actually making their job easier in some cases, and reporters appreciate leaders who willingly make themselves available. As you begin to earn their trust, these reporters will begin to depend upon you as a source of information and quotes.

- Utilize press releases: When there is a newsworthy event occurring at your center, such as the appearance of a well-known banquet speaker or the introduction of medical services, seek positive publicity by issuing a press release. Make sure that the press release contains necessary elements and is written in pyramid style with the most important information first followed by the next most important information. You should attempt to send this press release to reporters who cover life-related and regional issues for your local paper, local talk radio hosts, and the news desk at your local television station.
- Invite reporters to visit your center: Another great way to build positive relationships and trust with local media representatives is to personally invite them to visit your center or one of your special events, such as a banquet. It is best to issue such invitations to friendly media, but in some cases it might be reasonable to extend an invitation to a media representative that could be critical, particularly if your center has exceptional facilities or a medical staff.
- Submit Opinion Editorials and Letters to the Editor: Op-eds and letters to the editor are a great way to promote your message and to put your center on the local media's radar. Any time media attention is focused on issues that are relevant to your center such as life issues, pregnancy, sexuality, or women's health, you should attempt to submit an op-ed. If you have medical personnel on your board or staff encourage them to write an op-ed or to assist you with content. Additionally, if your center is attacked in a local or even national publication, it is a good idea for you or your medical staff or board members to submit a letter to the editor or editorial discussing the work of your center or any specific, factual evidence that substantiates your side of the issue. Keep the articles positive and focused on the message you are trying to convey.
- Avoid making rhetorical attacks on abortion groups: When faced with erroneous accusations from abortion proponents, it is often tempting to respond in kind. However, centers are encouraged to refrain from using subjective opinions or unsupported claims when speaking to the press. It is always better to use such opportunities to reach out and promote the positive work of your center and the many ways that you are helping men and women in your community. Before issuing a press release or contacting a reporter with information it is best to have someone review your statements and assure that they are objective and factually accurate. It is important that whatever you say publicly is consistent with the safe, compassionate, and non-judgmental image that your center seeks to portray to abortion-vulnerable women.
- Network, Network, Network: On a local scale, it is probable that someone who works with or supports your center has contacts with a media representative. Fostering these types of connections and using word of mouth references is a great way to initiate a relationship with a media source who may be willing to do a friendly article about your center or offer you advice on the reporters who would be friendly to your message.

3. Contacting Your Political Representatives

As many of the recent attacks on pregnancy centers have been political in nature, it is prudent for centers to actively foster relationships with local and national elected officials. By initiating contact with these representatives and providing them with open and honest communication about your center's services and the positive impact that you have on the men and women in your community, you will be able to discern those politicians and leaders that are friendly to your cause and who will likely be able to offer support, advice, and connections in the future.

One of the best ways to foster such relationships is to personally visit the local offices of your U.S. Senators and Representatives (you can find your congressional representatives and the addresses of their local offices by entering your zip code at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov). Phone calls, e-mails, and letters will rarely be brought to the attention of politicians, so it is always best to visit them in person, particularly when Congress is in Recess and Members are in their home districts.

Additionally, you should bring along a packet of information about your pregnancy center as well as a personalized letter discussing your center's role in the community as well as any particular issues of interest or concern. If your representative is not in their office leave behind the information, but make sure to get contact information and determine if they will allow you to schedule a meeting at a later date.

For more information about the role of public policy in your center, lobbying guidelines for nonprofit organizations, and the latest updates on life-related legislation in Congress, please contact Virginia Cline, Heartbeat's Director of Public Policy and Public Relations, at vcline@heartbeatinternational.org or visit the public policy section of our website at http://www.heartbeatinternational.org/public_policy.htm.

Conclusion

The attacks on pregnancy centers are a sharp reminder that working in a pregnancy center means engaging in a spiritual battle. Jesus says, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” Thank you for being willing to serve in an often hostile and lonely environment. Remember that you are not alone and that the “battle belongs to the Lord.” Do not carry it on your own shoulders.

Heartbeat will remain committed to advising you how to respond to the current attacks and how to avoid future unnecessary criticism. These attacks do not surprise us. It is clear that the pregnancy center movement is growing in size and influence. As we grow, we must be even more vigilant in prayer that the Light of Christ continues to shine in and through our movement.

Please do not hesitate to call Heartbeat if you have further questions in response to this material.