

Calgary Herald – Thursday, April 13, 2006
Respect for life hard to find here
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In this week of Passover and Easter, holidays that celebrate new life and redemption, the Herald editorial board visited the most unredeemable place in Calgary – the Kensington Clinic.

This is where 2,900 unborn babies are killed each year. Clinic staff don't like action verbs. They call it a "procedure." They're also fond of making smug pronouncements such as, "Don't judge someone until you've walked in their shoes." They can dance around the issue all they like; it doesn't change the fact that when you have a living being whose heart is beating, and you cause that heart to stop beating, you have killed that being. And it is entirely reasonable to pass judgment that killing is morally wrong.

Despite the fact clinic staff boast of handing out birth control information to all patients, 25 per cent, or 725 annually, are repeat abortions. This double whammy of irresponsibility is blithely labelled "choice."

The clinic does abortions up to 20 weeks. If your unborn baby is older than 20 weeks, staff will give you the addresses of U.S. clinics you can turn to. I asked Dr. Ted Busheikin if he ever looks at a near-20-week fetus after an abortion and wonders if this is a sentient being.

"No," he said. "I never think it might be sentient."

Those of us who are mothers know from our unborn children's reactions to noise and to our voices that those little beings are indeed sentient. Premature babies of the same age are certainly treated as sentient humans, for neonatologists struggle heroically to save them. Nobody decrees, after such a tiny baby's early arrival: "Next Tuesday, his soul will enter him and he will be fully conscious." Consciousness is simply assumed to be there.

What if scientists proved that a 12-week fetus feels pain and is sentient?

Busheikin shrugged. "It wouldn't matter," he said.

It wouldn't matter that you were dismembering a human being who was aware of its own existence and could feel the pain of being torn to pieces?

Busheikin insists "there's no evidence either way about when a fetus can feel pain."

He either is unaware, or chooses to ignore, that a British pro-choice doctor, Viviette Glover, thinks fetuses may feel pain at 17 weeks. Perhaps this information is considered suspect because it is circulated by Paul Ranalli, a pro-life Toronto neurologist, who noted in February in the Herald that two-thirds of Canadians want legal restrictions on abortion.

Clinic staff were upset with an editorial in which the Herald called on the federal government to follow the lead of some European countries and legislate a limit on gestational age for abortion.

“Why do you need a law, if it’s already the practice?” executive director Celia Posyniak asked, referring to the 20-week guideline.

Why does she object to a law being written down if the clinic already abides by it? Posyniak claims any doctor who performed an abortion over 20 weeks would be subject to discipline by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

But who would report that doctor? The patient certainly wouldn’t; the clinic staff aren’t going to. No one would ever know about it.

Asked whether patients are counselled on fetal development, Posyniak at first appeared not to understand the question.

“Women aren’t stupid. They know what stage of pregnancy they’re in,” she said.

When pressed, she said, “If they ask, we’ll show them, but it’s not forced on them. Why should they see fetal development?”

Why not? Shouldn’t a woman be fully informed before choosing abortion, that her fetus has a heartbeat by four weeks and brain activity by six weeks?

Asked about abortion statistics, Posyniak said StatsCan doesn’t track the numbers. She wrongly accused the Herald of being inaccurate in saying so, in another editorial. However, in conjunction with the Canadian Institute of Health Information, StatsCan tabulates the number of induced abortions by province, including age and marital status of the patient, number of previous induced abortions and “date fetus removed.”

This information is on Stats-Can’s website. And although Posyniak carried on about teens, StatsCan reports 53 per cent of women who had abortions in 2003, the latest year for figures, were in their 20s.

Clinic staff assured us they respect pro-life views. Yet, when questions about sentience and pain arose, Posyniak rolled her eyes in exasperation. Hardly a sign of respect for a dissenting view.

But that’s OK. I have no respect for anyone whose business is the systematic destruction of unborn babies.