Clinic doctor says women are entitled to safe care

By EDWARD PRATT
Advocate staff writer

As hundreds of people stood in summer's hot sun Thursday morning, Dr. Richardson Glidden took a break from his eight-minute "procedures" inside the Delta Women's Clinic.

Glidden has been performing "procedures"—or abortions—full-time since the early 1970s and since 1983 in Baton Rouge. As more than 1,000 people bent on stopping him surrounded the clinic Thursday morning, Glidden announced triumphantly that he had just performed more "procedures."

He said he had done "less than 10 procedures," but any number was a success, Glidden said, because the pro-life forces that surrounded the clinic had worked to shut him down.

As he leaned in a doorway of the Rennington Avenue clinic, several pro-choice supporters offered him support.

The Baton Rouge Advocate
Friday, July 10, 1992
Page 1A Columns 4-5
CONTINUED FROM 1A

"Bless you," a woman said.

It was an ironic compliment for Gildden, who is the target of seething hatred from several religious groups who make up a large portion of the pro-life movement.

To pro-life forces he is public enemy No. 1 here, a man so foul that he is destined to eternal damnation. He is a "baby killer" and a "murderer," and, they say, there will be no mercy for him in the hereafter.

Gildden has heard that since the early 1970s when he started performing abortions on a full-time basis.

"I have a strong faith in God. I know God loves me and leads me," the 61-year-old physician said. "I'm doing a job that needs to be done."

But, Gildden, who lost a lung to cancer six years ago, said he is ready to chuck it all for full retirement and "more time to enjoy my grandchildren."

"If I had someone to take my place I would quit tomorrow," he said. But he won't.

Gildden is the only physician at Delta, and he said his departure, without a replacement, could lead to the collapse of Delta.

"I'm the only glue right now that's holding this together," he said.

He is concerned that Louisiana's abortion law, one of the strictest in the United States, will make it hard for Delta to find a replacement.

"What doctor would come to Louisiana?" he asked.

Gildden said he never intended to perform abortions full-time. When he started out in 1963 in Delaware he did general gynecological and obstetrics work. In the early 1970s, he started performing abortions as a sideline. But soon it became a full-time job.

Once they find out you're doing abortions, they won't let you do anything else," Gildden said angrily, pointing to the pro-life supporters demonstrating near Delta. Their protests in Delaware and here pretty much scared away many of the other patients for other gynecological and obstetric services, he said.

Some in the medical community consider abortion its dirty little, Gildden stands behind what he does and defends Delta.

"Women are entitled to safe reproductive care," he said, "and we're not some sleazy joint . . . . An awful lot of my colleagues are not willing to stand up to the heat and do the job."

Before working full-time at Delta, Gildden said he worked at Woman's Hospital.

"After working there for five years, it was hard to get a nod out of them on the hallway," he said.

"You know, when you look at it, you don't expect everyone to like you, but you at least want to be respected," he said.

Gildden said there may be physicians who fear speaking in support of him might cause a backlash against them from pro-life supporters.

"They may not want to take that risk, and I don't blame them. I don't blame them for not being vocal," he said.

Gildden is married and has three adult daughters. He won't say if any of them have had an abortion. But he does say that "should any of them need one they know they can come to me for advice . . . ." Gildden said it was partially for his family's peace of mind that he moved to Alabama a couple of years ago.

While he lived in Baton Rouge, pro-life advocates would occasionally demonstrate in front of his house. Sometimes, he said, they would harass his wife.

Now he lives in Alabama and comes to Baton Rouge to perform abortions on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Gildden has been hazy on answering questions about his residence in Alabama, apparently fearing reprisals from pro-life supporters. But, if that's the case, some pro-life advocates made that a moot issue Thursday when they distributed fliers announcing a $1,000 reward for information that would stop Gildden "from murdering pre-born children. The reward is also being offered for information that would lead to the revocation of his medical license."

The leaflet also lists Gildden's address, medical license number, description of his automobile and its license plate number.

Gildden said he isn't overly concerned that overzealous pro-life advocates might try to attack him physically.

"Where we live in Alabama, the safety and protection of my home is a lot stronger than it was in this state. My family worries about it a lot more than I do," he said, before heading back into the clinic for more "procedures."