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TREATMENTS

Proportion Of OB-GYNs Offering Abortions May Be Lower Than Thought

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By Jenny Gold

For women seeking an abortion, finding a doctor willing to offer one is easier said than done.

Ninety-seven percent of OB-GYNs have encountered patients wanting an abortion, but only 14 percent of the doctors perform them, according to a study published today in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*. That finding suggests a smaller percentage of OB-GYNs may be offering abortion services than previous studies have estimated.

Access to abortion has become more limited over the past few decades, the researchers write. Another recent study found that in 2008, 87 percent of U.S. counties (where 35 percent of reproductive-aged women live) didn't have any abortion providers. Since 1996, however, all OB-GYN residents have been required to learn how to perform the procedure.

This year, states have passed at least 80 new abortion restrictions — double the previous annual record of 34 seen in 2005, and more than triple 2010's 23 changes.

A woman's best chance of finding a willing doctor?

- Women physicians are more likely than male physicians to provide an abortion (19 percent vs. 11 percent);

- Young doctors (ages 26 to 35) are the most likely to offer abortion, followed by the oldest doctors (ages 56 to 65);
- Doctors in the Northeast or West are more likely to offer the procedure than those in the South or Midwest; and,
- Urban doctors are more likely than rural doctors to perform abortions.

Religious affiliation, as you might imagine, turns out to be a fairly significant indicator of whether a doctor will or won't provide abortions. Forty percent of Jewish doctors say yes, compared with 1 percent of evangelicals. Nine percent of Roman Catholics or members of Eastern Orthodox churches were likely to perform abortions. Among OB-GYNs, 10 percent of non-evangelical Protestants, 20 percent of Hindus and 27 percent of doctors who said they had no religious affiliation said they offer abortion services.

Few doctors who work in Catholic facilities, which often restrict abortion, do.

The findings were compiled from surveys mailed to 1,800 OB-GYNs across the U.S. More than 1,100 doctors provided valid responses. One question the survey didn't ask: Do doctors who don't offer abortions refer patients to their colleagues who do?

