Catholic doctor to challenge abortion pill reversal ban at UK High Court

8 February 2022
FIAMC, february 8th, 2022

A Catholic doctor is preparing to challenge an order at the High Court in London, England, blocking him from offering life-saving treatment for unborn babies.

Dermot Kearney, a consultant cardiologist and past president of the Catholic Medical Association (UK), is currently prohibited from offering a treatment known as "abortion pill reversal" (APR). The General Medical Council (GMC), which regulates U.K. doctors, referred the case to an interim orders tribunal, which ruled that Kearney had to stop providing the treatment, in which a pregnant woman who has taken an abortion pill is given the natural hormone progesterone.

The tribunal said that the interim conditions should "remain in place, subject to review" after a hearing last month. When the case is heard at the Royal Courts of Justice on Feb. 24, lawyers will argue that the interim order should never have been issued and ought to be lifted.

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, which is supporting Kearney, who works in Britain's National Health Service, said that the ban was wrong. "We have seen many women immediately regret taking the first abortion pill. Dr. Kearney offers the possibility of saving the pregnancy when this happens. He should have the freedom to do it," she said. "Abortion providers are putting women on a conveyer belt which means once they start the abortion process, they have to go through with it and are pressured to do so or left with no alternatives." "Women should be properly informed, as a matter of course, that the baby's death is not inevitable after the first pill is taken."

Mifepristone, also known as Mifeprex and RU-486, is a pill that pregnant women commonly take first when seeking a medical abortion (also known as a chemical abortion), followed later by a second pill containing misoprostol. Abortion advocates and the pro-choice media have repeatedly attacked APR, claiming that it is "unproven" and "unethical."

Critics cite a U.S. study of the treatment that was stopped in 2019 after some participants were admitted to emergency rooms. The Christian Legal Centre, the legal ministry of the group Christian Concern, argued in a Feb. 7 press release that the criticisms were misleading, saying that "two of the three women in the study who suffered hemorrhage requiring emergency care were given placebos following mifepristone administration," while only one had received progesterone. "Citing this study, it has been concluded by opponents of APR that progesterone administered in this context represents a serious danger to women. However, the limited findings of this study in no way support the idea that APR treatment is dangerous," it commented. The Christian Legal Centre said that there was "a spike" in women seeking APR after the authorities in England gave temporary permission for at-home medical abortions in March 2020 during the first nationwide coronavirus lockdown. "This means that women who are under 10 weeks pregnant can currently request, receive and take these pills without any human contact other than a short telephone call, often with someone who is not medically qualified," it said.

St. Josephine Bakhita sculpture shines light on reality of human trafficking

"One woman has described the process of getting the abortion pills as 'easier than getting a takeaway' [takeout] and serious safety and ethical concerns have been repeatedly raised in parliament." The organization quoted a woman identified only as Rachel, who said that Kearney had helped her after she became pregnant during lockdown and took the first abortion pill. "If it wasn't for Dr. Kearney, our child would not be alive," she said. "We have not once regretted the decision to reverse the termination and we are grateful to Dr. Kearney for being there for us."

Andrea Williams said that other women had expressed gratitude for Kearney's help. "Even where the babies were not saved, or where they decided to decline the progesterone treatment, they feel that he has cared for them and helped them when they most needed it. He steps into the breach where the abortion providers are manifestly failing," she said. "In any other area of medicine, treatment would be stopped if consent was withdrawn. Is ideology and the vested interests of abortion providers in the U.K. getting in the way of the woman's right to choose?"

In a June 2021 interview with the National Catholic Register, Kearney said that he was leaning on his Catholic faith during his present difficulties. “In dealing with these trials that have lately come my way, I am reminded of the actress Patricia Heaton when she was asked why she is not afraid to give witness to her faith among celebrity and Hollywood elites,” he said. “I take her response and adapt it. On Judgment Day, it won’t be the GMC that I have to stand before and give account of my life.”