

# Hospitals' abortion policies vary

By Ann Owens

A woman wanting an abortion in Lincoln can check into a hospital in the morning, take an anesthetic, have the abortion at noon and be home by 6 p.m. that same day—for a total cost between \$250 and \$400.

According to family practice physician Irving E. Weston, M.D., most legal abortions performed in Lincoln are done in hospitals.

When abortions upon request were legalized in Nebraska, physicians set what Weston called a reasonable fee of about \$150. The hospital bill at Bryan Memorial Hospital, where Weston performed about 40 abortions during 1974 and 1975, is less than \$200. This makes the total cost of a hospital abortion approximately \$350.

"I don't believe the actual physicians' price for an abortion has decreased as abortions have become more accessible," Weston said. However, most abortions were previously performed in New York City, he said, which considerably added to the cost of pre-1973 abortions.

According to Eugene Edwards, Bryan Memorial Hospital administrator, about four or five doctors perform abortions at Bryan.

"I don't know how many (abortions) each doctor does, but even if I did, I couldn't tell you," he said.

"Although few abortions are done at Bryan (71 were performed in 1975), we allow competent physicians trained to perform abortions on our staff to perform elective abortions," Edwards said.

Elective abortions are those performed before the first 20 weeks of pregnancy.

### Medical reasons needed

Therapeutic abortions, done usually for medical reasons rather than elective termination, are performed after 20 weeks of pregnancy and require consultation, Edwards said.

"Bryan doesn't actually have a set policy," Edwards said. "Most abortions are performed as a transaction between a patient and her physician."

Lincoln General Hospital, like Bryan, has no established abortion policy, according to Tom Smith, director of nursing administration.

Lincoln General, which performed 424 abortions between February 1973 and December, 1975, treats abortions as it does other surgical procedures, Smith said. "If the doctor calls for an abortion, then Lincoln General allows it to be performed," he said.

Lincoln's St. Elizabeth's Hospital, under the sponsorship of a Catholic order, maintains a no-abortion policy.

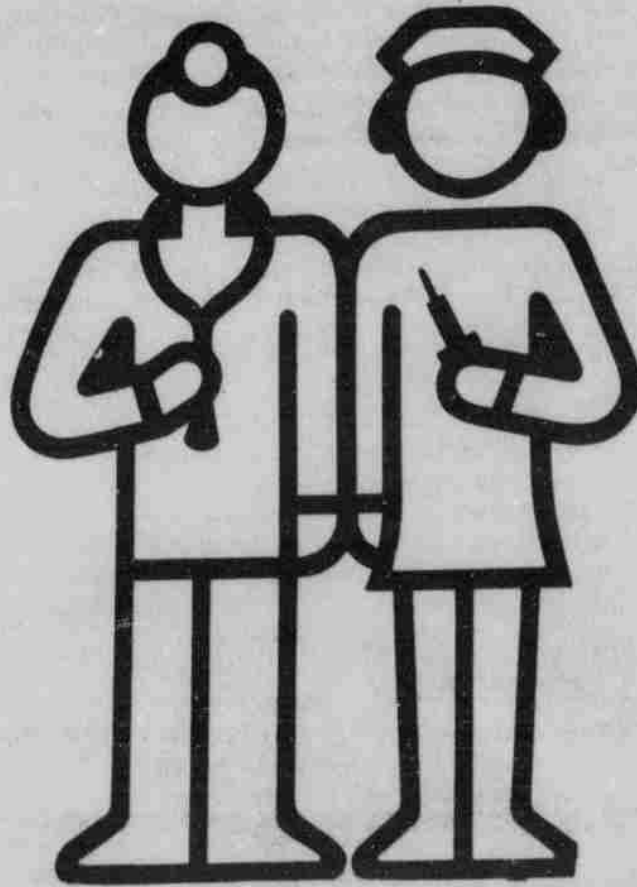
### Many violate law

According to the Coalition on Abortion, St. Elizabeth's in one of many Nebraska hospitals violating the state's

1973 abortion law.

A study by the coalition in September, 1974 showed that of 110 hospitals contacted in an effort to determine availability of abortions in specific Nebraska geographic areas, only 48 replied.

Of the 48 hospitals, only 31 per cent indicated they would permit therapeutic and elective abortions. Thirty-three per cent said they will not permit any abortion or will permit only therapeutic abortions.



Another 27 per cent refused to answer the question as to whether they permitted abortions and 9 per cent said their doctors are not interested in or qualified to perform abortions.

According to coalition members, Nebraska's hospitals are jeopardizing their tax-exempt status by continuing a no-abortion policy.

Weston said he thinks doctors and hospitals infringe on personal liberties when they refuse to perform abortions for moral or religious reasons.

## third dimension | abortion

"I think the abortion laws arrived at by the Supreme Court were arrived at justly and insightfully," Weston said.

### Abortion a personal liberty

He added that the evolution of a society involving personal liberties, the women's equal rights movement and the idea that a person should have control over his or her own destiny—including his physical body—included the necessity of having control over one's reproductive system.

"I'm frightened by the minority of ill-advised, ill-informed and closed-minded people incapable of being dynamic," Weston said. "It seems like these people are always very vocal, unbending people—the same group opposing sex education."

George Adam, family planning director at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, where Weston learned how to perform abortions, said he thinks each doctor independently should be able to decide whether or not he wants to perform an abortion.

"We have no more right to say that a doctor has to perform an abortion than we do to deny a woman the right to an abortion," he said.

The medical center would refuse to perform an abortion if they thought a woman were being forced by someone to request the abortion, Adam said. Often a woman's attitude indicates if she is being forced to have the abortion or if she really wants one.

### Improves mental health

"However if most women really want the abortion, their mental health will be better as a result of the abortion."

Weston expressed a similar opinion.

"I think that doctors in Lincoln are cognizant of psychological consequences of an abortion on their patient and evaluate very carefully before going ahead with the abortion."

"In some instances, an abortion might not be in the patient's best interest," he said.

Weston said he thinks a pregnancy beyond 20 weeks should not be interrupted.

Even though the abortion law now states that abortions can be performed up until 24 weeks of pregnancy, Adam said, Nebraska physicians don't perform abortions after the 20th week.

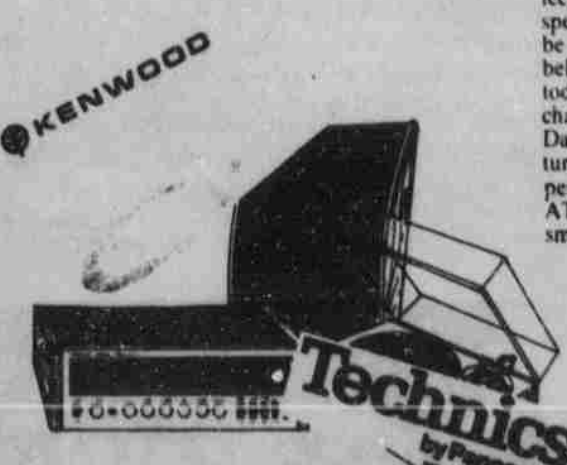
"This is just to make sure we won't deliver a live fetus while performing the abortion," Adam said.

The medical center performs three types of abortions, Adam said. An endometrial aspiration, the simplest procedure, costs \$50 in Nebraska and can be performed in a physician's office on women who are less than seven weeks pregnant.

Continued on p. 8

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