2018

CRISIS
PREGNANCY CENTERS

A THREAT TO
REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

NARAL PRO-CHOICE CONNECTICUT FOUNDATION

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1 Main Street, Suite T4
Hartford, CT 06105

prochoicect.org
info@prochoicect.org
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Crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) are faith-based anti-abortion counseling centers whose mission is to counsel people facing unplanned pregnancies away from choosing abortion. CPCs are the ground level presence of a carefully coordinated and well-funded national anti-choice movement, and here in Connecticut we are not immune to that reach. CPCs are unregulated in our state, and their first point of contact with people facing unplanned pregnancies is often through misleading and deceptive advertisements about the services they provide. Under the guise of being a comprehensive reproductive healthcare clinic, CPCs often use delay tactics, biased counseling, and medically inaccurate information to steer people away from choosing abortion and other time sensitive reproductive healthcare procedures.

This report contains findings from NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut Foundation's 2017 statewide investigations into CPCs in Connecticut, updating an earlier version of this research published in 2015. A series of in-person visits, website analyses, phone surveys, literature analyses, and a case study reveal the findings below.

**INVESTIGATION HIGHLIGHTS**

- CPCs routinely use deceptive advertising online, in printed materials, and other locations to present themselves as if they are comprehensive reproductive healthcare clinics.

- In Connecticut, there are 25 CPCs, including a mobile van that travels around the state. CPCs often deliberately position themselves near reproductive healthcare providers with the intention of confusing people seeking legitimate healthcare. Additionally, some CPCs position themselves in areas where there are not many providers, effectively targeting already medically underserved populations in our state including young people, people of color, and people with low incomes.

- Under the guise of being a comprehensive reproductive healthcare provider, CPCs routinely use delay tactics and medically inaccurate information to steer people away from choosing abortion and other time sensitive reproductive healthcare.

- CPCs exists to achieve an ideologically driven, anti-abortion mission.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Every individual is entitled to seek whatever support they feel they need when facing an unplanned pregnancy, however it is a serious threat to public health in our state when people are seeking comprehensive reproductive healthcare and are confused or delayed in accessing it. To limit deception, we recommend that the state limit the advertising practices of CPCs in Connecticut, targeting their deceptive commercial speech. As a proactive measure, we also recommend passing legislation to prevent ideologically-driven, anti-choice organizations from receiving state funding, since their work undermines the healthcare needs of Connecticut residents. Any person seeking reproductive healthcare should be able to do so without confusion, deception, or delays, and we urge legislators to support policy ensuring this right.

A NOTE ON GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The need for time-sensitive healthcare relating to pregnancy can impact people of all genders. Throughout this report we have used gender-inclusive language to reflect this fact. It should be noted that the language used by CPCs is almost uniformly gendered and uses pregnancy as an identifier of the individuals they target, often calling them “moms” under the assumption they are serving cisgender heterosexual women. Many lesbian, bisexual, queer or other sexual minority women engage in heterosexual relationships over the course of their lives. In comparison with heterosexual women who have sex with men only, lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to experience unintended pregnancies. CPCs also routinely locate in medically underserved areas and target medically underserved populations. Because LGBTQ+ people already face significant health disparities and barriers to accessing healthcare, especially culturally competent reproductive healthcare, we are particularly concerned with the harm that may be done to someone who is deceived by a CPC.
According to the most recent national data available, nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended. When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, many people seek guidance and information about their options from a variety of sources, which may include medical care or faith-based support. When people are seeking faith-based support or counseling it is expected they will specifically go to organizations and faith leaders whom they trust and know align with their religious beliefs. When people are seeking medical care and nonjudgmental options counseling, however, it is expected that they will specifically seek out a legitimate reproductive healthcare provider or clinic, and they should be able to do so without confusion or deception.

DEFINITION OF A CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTER

Crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) are faith-based anti-abortion counseling centers whose primary goal is to convince people facing unplanned pregnancies not to choose abortion. For the purposes of legislation, a crisis pregnancy center can be defined as follows:

A facility, including mobile facilities, the primary purpose of which is to provide services to women who are or may be pregnant, that either (1) offers obstetric ultrasounds, obstetric sonograms or prenatal care to pregnant women, or (2) has the appearance of a medical facility. A pregnancy service center has the appearance of a medical facility if two or more of the following factors are present:

(A) The facility offers pregnancy testing and/or pregnancy diagnosis;
(B) The facility has staff or volunteers who wear medical attire and uniforms;
(C) The facility contains one or more examination tables;
(D) The facility contains a private or semi-private room or area containing medical supplies and/or medical instruments;
(E) The facility has staff or volunteers who collect health information from clients; or
(F) The facility is located on the same premises as a state-licensed medical facility or provider or shares facility space with a state-licensed medical provider.”
CPCs are part of a well-coordinated and well-funded anti-choice pregnancy center movement that is powerful in the United States today. It is estimated that there are close to 2,500 CPCs in the nation. The advertising, tactics, and services offered by these CPCs are driven by close relationships with national and international anti-choice organizations such as Care Net, Heartbeat International, Birthright International, and the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates.

THERE ARE ABOUT 2,500 ANTI-CHOICE CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS IN THE UNITED STATES
"Women seeking abortions, women that are pregnant, that are vulnerable, they are going into Google and they are typing ‘pregnancy symptoms.’… We want to look professional… business-like. And, yeah, we do kind of want to look medical."

Pregnancy center movement leader, Abby Johnson, said at a training for CPCs

"The best client you ever get is one that thinks they’re walking into an abortion clinic."
"[Women are] going to Google 'abortion,' or they're going to Google 'abortion services' or 'pregnancy help,' and that's why we want to focus on our websites..."

"We want to be strategic in getting them to our centers."

Lauren Chenoweth, a former media specialist at Heartbeat International®
In Connecticut there are 25 CPCs, a majority of which are associated with four major national anti-choice organizations.

Locations of Crisis Pregnancy Centers and Licensed Family Planning Clinics, 2018

Data sources: CT DEEP, NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut
Cartographer: K. Diver, March 2018

20 Miles
Although CPCs are clearly tied to national anti-choice organizations, many CPCs in Connecticut do not transparently advertise as being religiously affiliated or having an anti-abortion mission. Instead, CPCs often use deceptive and misleading advertisements to present themselves as though they are reproductive health clinics, meanwhile having an ideologically driven anti-abortion agenda and often no medical staff on site. Some CPCs have someone they term a “medical director” who is a licensed medical provider of some kind, but that person is most not often available on the premises to provide care. Instead, CPCs rely on volunteers or staff who have no medical training yet sometimes wear scrubs or white lab coats to give the appearance that they are medical professionals.

One of the 25 CPCs in Connecticut is a mobile van that travels to grocery store parking lots, food pantries, and public green spaces.
When a person is following up on these misleading advertisements, they are most likely looking for a legitimate reproductive healthcare clinic that offers all-options counseling and a full range of medical services and information. Intentionally misleading and denying someone access to this medical care removes a patient’s ability to make informed and timely decisions about their health and futures.

While CPCs do provide some services such as basic pregnancy testing, material support such as baby clothes or other items, and religiously-based counseling by unlicensed volunteers, it is crucial for informed consent and timely medical decision making that CPCs are honest and transparent about the services they provide.

As shown in the chart below, the services offered by CPCs differ substantially from the range of medical services available at licensed reproductive healthcare clinics.
TARGETING SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHICS

CPCs target groups that are most underserved by the current healthcare system. These groups include young people, people of color, and people with low incomes.

More than 80% of CPCs in the state are located less than five miles away from a college or university campus.

72% of CPCs in Connecticut operate in communities with higher-than-average populations of color.

64% of CPCs operate in communities with a higher-than-average population of people living in poverty.
Transparency and truth in advertising are fundamental to informed consent in medical decision making, especially when it comes to time sensitive services such as abortion and emergency contraception. The work of these fake clinics attempts to mislead and thereby delay people in accessing the care they are seeking. When CPCs deliberately confuse, deceive, and delay people in finding comprehensive medical care, patients may miss the opportunity to use emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy, their options for abortion care may change (i.e. they may miss the window for a medication abortion), or they may miss the window of opportunity to access an abortion altogether.
To investigate CPCs in Connecticut, our research consisted of five parts: 1) compiling a current list of CPCs operating in Connecticut, based on the definition in the introduction of this report, 2) analyzing website content available for CPCs in Connecticut, 3) analyzing literature and other materials collected at CPCs, 4) scheduling appointments at CPCs via phone, and 5) sending undercover volunteers for in-person visits to CPCs.

**COMPILING A LIST OF CPCs IN CONNECTICUT**

The initial phase of our investigation focused on building on NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut Foundation’s 2015 report, The Right to Lie: Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Connecticut, to identify all CPCs in Connecticut. As CPCs often change locations, hours, contact information, and name, it is difficult to discern the exact number of CPCs in the state. Through internet research, phone-calls, and in-person visits, our investigators determined that there are 25 CPCs currently operating in the state, including a mobile crisis pregnancy center van that travels around the state, stopping in grocery store parking lots, outside food pantries, and in public green spaces.

**WEBSITE ANALYSIS**

All 25 CPC websites were reviewed and data was collected using a standard survey instrument. The survey instrument included questions about the CPC’s listing of available services, disclosure about providing/referring for abortion, medical information about abortion, emergency contraception, birth control, STDs and STIs, and more.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Building off literature collected from the 22-in person investigations of the 2015 report, investigators collected all materials made available by the CPC. All written materials were analyzed using a standard survey instrument to ensure uniformity. The survey tool included questions about the services advertised, medical information available, terminology used, and any other information not otherwise tracked on the survey instrument.
Building on the 22 in-person investigations from 2015, our team conducted 5 in-person visits over the course of 6 months in 2017. These visits were chosen based on volunteer travel ability and geographic spread.

To complete this research, we trained undercover volunteer investigators to schedule appointments at CPCs, conduct in-person visits, and report back on the experience. All investigators received training and were instructed to schedule an appointment by phone and then visit the center with a partner for safety. Trainings included information about CPCs, what to expect during a visit, creating a backstory, and a question and answer section. A standard post-visit survey instrument was used to ensure uniformity. The post-visit survey instrument included questions on the overall visit, the physical appearance and geographic location of the CPC, a description of the waiting room, the counseling experience, presence of a medical provider, availability of an ultrasound, medical information about pregnancy, abortion, birth control, or STDs, and anecdotal information about conversations or experiences not otherwise tracked on the survey instrument. Investigators recorded findings on the survey instrument and completed a debrief with NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut Foundation staff immediately after each visit.

CASE STUDY
NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut also conducted an in-depth case study on a crisis pregnancy center in Hartford, Connecticut. The tactics of this particular crisis pregnancy center reflect the deceptive practices that are used by CPCs across the country, including locating in the same condominium complex as a legitimate reproductive health clinic, Hartford GYN Center. In partnership with Hartford GYN Center, this case study included a website analysis, literature analysis, in-person documentation by clinic escort volunteers, and the collection of stories from patients who had been intercepted or deceived by the neighboring CPC.

LIMITATIONS
The results of the investigation show trends in the practices of CPCs in Connecticut. The findings do not seek to make blanket statements about all nonprofit, pregnancy-related centers in Connecticut, and this report does not seek to make statements about any specific CPC or person. A limitation of this in-person data collection is reliability as each CPC visited was only visited once. It is possible that multiple visits to the same CPC may have yielded different results each time. Additionally, not all CPCs in Connecticut were visited due to constraints of time and volunteer ability.
FINDINGS

INVESTIGATION HIGHLIGHTS

A team of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut Foundation staff and volunteers completed investigations including in-person visits, phone surveys, website analyses, and analyses of literature made available by crisis pregnancy centers in Connecticut. The major findings of the investigation are as follows:

- CPCs routinely use deceptive advertising online, in printed materials, and other locations to present themselves as if they are comprehensive reproductive healthcare clinics.

- In Connecticut there are 25 CPCs, including a mobile van that travels around the state to grocery store parking lots, food pantries, and public green spaces. CPCs often deliberately position themselves near reproductive healthcare providers with the intention of confusing people seeking legitimate healthcare. Additionally, some CPCs position themselves in areas where there are not many providers, effectively targeting already medically underserved populations in our state including young people, people of color, and people with low incomes.

- Under the guise of being a comprehensive reproductive healthcare provider, CPCs routinely use delay tactics and medically inaccurate information to steer people away from choosing abortion and other time sensitive reproductive healthcare.

- CPCs exists to achieve an ideologically driven anti-abortion mission.
DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES

One of the most common tactics of CPCs in Connecticut is to use misleading and deceptive advertising. The names, signage, locations, and language used on websites, advertisements, and brochures are often chosen with the intention of confusing people seeking reproductive healthcare. NARAL Pro-Choice America found that many CPCs use deceptive advertising on Internet databases, search engines, and phone books. When someone searches for terms including “abortion” or other similar terms, CPCs are often included in the results.
DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES

The names, signage, locations, and language used on websites, advertisements, and brochures are often with the intention of confusing people seeking reproductive healthcare.

CPCs will often emulate the appearance of a medical office with CPC staff wearing scrubs or white lab coats. Advertisements often use language referring to appointments, options, and medical information despite no presence of medical staff.
DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES

It’s common to feel confused, scared, or overwhelmed. We know how you feel, and you’re not alone.

Many of our staff have been where you are and can help you understand your choices.

Abortion

If you’re considering abortion, it will be helpful to know what types of abortions are available, what your rights are with abortion providers and the short- and long-term risks to consider.

Give us a call if you have questions about abortion pills, surgical abortion procedures, or how much an abortion may cost. The types of abortion procedures that may be available at an abortion provider depend on factors such as how far along a woman is in her pregnancy and what kinds of procedures an abortion provider offers. While we do not provide or refer for abortions, our staff can have a confidential conversation with you about abortion procedures, potential risks, and other pregnancy options.
MANY CPCS USE DECEPTIVE NAMES & SIGNAGE TO MIMIC REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CLINICS

Many CPCs will use deceptive names and signage to mimic real clinics. Often they will use names like “women’s center” or “pregnancy center.” 52% of CPCs in Connecticut use names like this. The director of one CPC stated they realized their religiously affiliated name may prevent some people from calling, so the CPC changed their name to more closely reflect a nearby abortion care provider.

CPCS INTENTIONALLY LOCATE NEAR LEGITIMATE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

A common tactic of CPCs is to intentionally locate in the same office buildings as healthcare providers, near hospitals, and near abortion providers. In Connecticut, 64% of CPCs operate in a municipality with existing family planning clinics. Some CPCs are even located directly across from or on the same street as abortion providers.

“I had trouble finding it because it was right behind an OB-GYN office. We parked in 'patient parking.' It felt like we were walking up to a doctor’s office.”
GIVING THE APPEARANCE OF A MEDICAL FACILITY

Deception may also come in the form of physical characteristics of the CPC that look like a medical office. Nearly 50% of CPCs investigated had the appearance of a medical clinic, had staff wearing scrubs or with lab coats, or both.

“When she got the pregnancy test she put on a white lab coat and walked me down the hall to a room to do the test.” - Anonymous patient

"I didn't know where I was going. We opened the door of the wrong building and this lady was standing there wearing scrubs saying 'we're offering $50 and free ultrasounds.' - Anonymous patient

"On her badge it said RN... but I don't know if she was because she couldn't pronounce any of the medications. And then she told me I could give these prenatal vitamins to my 2-year-old daughter."
CPCS OFTEN DISSEMINATE MEDICALLY INACCURATE INFORMATION UNDER THE GUISE OF BEING A COMPREHENSIVE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CLINIC

72% of CPCs provided inaccurate medical information about abortion and/or emergency contraception or birth control. This medical information was disseminated either on websites, over the phone, in-person, or through literature provided at the centers.

MYTH #1: ABORTION CAUSES BREAST CANCER

One of the most common pieces of medically inaccurate information disseminated by CPCs is the assertion that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer and other types of cancer. Contrary to this misinformation, there have been extensive studies discounting this link. The National Cancer Institute, The American Cancer Society, and the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists have all refuted an association between any kind of abortion and breast cancer.

60% of CPCs in Connecticut provide medically inaccurate information about abortion and breast cancer.

Consider Other Risks of Abortion
MYTH #2: ABORTION IS DANGEROUS AND LEADS TO INFERTILITY OR DEATH

Another common piece of medically inaccurate information disseminated by CPCs is that abortion is a dangerous procedure that can lead to future infertility, complications, or death. In reality, abortion is a very common and very safe medical procedure. An abortion performed in the first trimester of pregnancy is one of the safest medical procedures and it carries little risk—less than 0.05%—of major complications. Additionally, abortions performed in the first trimester pose virtually no risk of longer term complications such as infertility, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, birth defects, or premature or low weight births.

MYTH #3: ABORTION CAUSES PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE

Another common piece of misinformation disseminated by CPCs is the claim that abortion results in depression, so-called “Post-Abortion Stress Disorder,” or “Post Abortion Stress Syndrome.” Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome has been disproven and is not a recognized medical condition by the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, or the American Psychiatric Association. In reality, the most common feeling that people cite after an abortion is relief. Additionally, experts have concluded that the risk of mental health problems for women who have unplanned pregnancy is no greater if they have an abortion or if they carry the pregnancy to term.
MYTH #4: MISINFORMATION ABOUT CONTRACEPTION

In addition to providing medically inaccurate information about abortion, many CPCs also provide medically inaccurate information about emergency contraception and birth control. CPCs visited provided misleading information regarding the risks associated with birth control and emergency contraception.

"Using condoms is like playing Russian Roulette. The 'game' where one bullet is put in a six-shooter's cylinder and the gun is pointed at your head and fired. In chamber one you have a condom that breaks and you get syphilis, in chamber two you have a routinely fatal disease."
MYTH #5: ABORTION REVERSAL

Crisis pregnancy centers often advertise in materials a procedure called “abortion pill reversal.” This is a potentially dangerous procedure where proponents argue they can stop the effects of a pill-induced abortion by giving someone a large dose of the hormone progesterone after they have taken the first pill of the two-part abortion pill procedure.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has declared that so-called “abortion pill reversal” is unsupported by any scientific evidence.
DELAY TACTICS

A common practice of CPCs in Connecticut is to delay people in accessing reproductive healthcare, particularly abortion care. Delays in care can limit a person's decision on the type of abortion procedure they choose, increase costs, and in some cases, make it too late for someone to receive an abortion.

Many CPCs also suggested the possibility of a miscarriage to resolve an unintended pregnancy.

“She just kept telling me, ‘You have time to decide. You don't need to decide now. You can schedule an appointment after the holiday, and even if you can't make it that's okay. Don't worry, you have time.’"

“She was hiding her pregnancy from her family and had been seeing a women’s center, a crisis pregnancy center, because she wanted a termination. She told me she had gone every few weeks for the last few months, but was not given any instructions on how to have an abortion yet. Performing her ultrasound, I was able to determine her fetus was 25 weeks and 4 days, past the legal limit for abortion. I had to tell her that even though she had clearly indicated her desire to terminate, now she had no choice in the matter because she had been misled and pushed past the legal limit.” – Emergency Room Physician
To best understand the breadth of CPC practices, a case study on CPCs in the City of Hartford is revealing. The following documentation draws on evidence on public record from Hartford City Council’s public hearing on November 20th, 2017.

In Spring of 2017, a crisis pregnancy center, St. Gerard’s Center for Life, bought the building about 20 feet away from Hartford GYN Center, a state-licensed family planning clinic that has been offering comprehensive reproductive healthcare in the Hartford community for 36 years. This situation in Hartford reflects many of the tactics used by CPCs around the state and nationally.
DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING, SIGNAGE, AND LOCATION

One of the most common tactics used by CPCs is to intentionally use similar signage and locate next to licensed clinics or other medical providers. Upon moving in next to Hartford GYN, a licensed family planning clinic, St. Gerard’s Center for Life began doing business as “Hartford Women’s Center” in an attempt to confuse patients seeking legitimate medical care at Hartford GYN Center.

The CPC and Hartford GYN Center share a brick walkway in the Jefferson Court condominium complex in Hartford. All patients of Hartford GYN Center walk past these advertisement on the way to their appointments.
“When I was walking to the building there was a door open and the lady said, “Come in here” to me an my mom. She was on the phone and said “I have to call you back I have a patient coming in”… She didn’t ask for my ID or health insurance. She was saying I was sinning if I get an abortion and that I’m gonna regret it. She was saying stuff like if I get a surgical one I might not make it out alive. She said that someone had half a baby left inside her after. She was ignoring what I was saying… Seeing all the stuff in the office scared me as well… there was a basket of different colored little babies and it was really dark in there. She had us sit down and talk with her like that was the real place.

I was scared.”
A second common tactic used by CPCs around the state, and specifically in Hartford, is the dissemination of false medical information to counsel people away from abortion. One of the most common myths perpetuated is the linkage between abortion and breast cancer. Hartford GYN patients have been followed when coming and going to their appointments by volunteers of the CPC who disseminate false medical information verbally and in pamphlets.

“They said to me like “miscarriages are the result of premarital sex,” and “Estrogen causes cancer.” That was in response to my not answering questions about me being on birth control. One of the [Hartford Women’s Center] people followed [my son] and I to our car one day asking me about why I’d been there, my birth control status, etc. She claimed to be a RN and told me that her expertise had taught her about the myriad dangers of birth control, and of course, abortion. She was definitely with Hartford Women’s Center. She was handing out their postcards... The postcard they passed even claimed they could reverse the abortion pill. I then began to push her on her status as a RN, and she then claimed that she was no longer an RN, she had been retired for a number of years. Worst part was that she made [my son] nervous...”
Our investigations of anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers in Connecticut show that CPCs are routinely engaging in deceptive advertising practices to confuse people seeking reproductive healthcare. It is a serious threat to public health in our state when people are seeking time sensitive productive healthcare and are deliberately confused, deceived, or delayed in finding it. Patients may miss the opportunity to use emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy or their options for abortion care may change. For example, they may miss the window for obtaining a medication abortion. In more extreme circumstances, patients may miss the window of opportunity to access an abortion altogether.

Any organization can provide services to people in their community, however we are particularly concerned with deceptive advertising practices by CPCs. To limit deception, we recommend that the state limit the advertising practices of crisis pregnancy centers in Connecticut, targeting their deceptive commercial speech. As a proactive measure we also recommend passing legislation to prevent ideologically-driven anti-choice organizations from receiving state funding, since their work undermines the healthcare needs of Connecticut residents. Any person seeking reproductive healthcare should be free to do so without deception, confusion, or delays, and we urge legislators to support policy ensuring this right.
Shania*, 21, patient deceived by a crisis pregnancy center in the Greater Hartford area
“When we parked there were people outside and I didn't want to get out of the car. I was scared. When I was walking to the building there was a door open and the lady said, "Come in here" to me and my mom. She was on the phone and said "I have to call you back I have a patient coming in" and sat us down. The lady was just being really obnoxious to me and saying stuff that had me scared. She didn't ask for my ID or health insurance. She was saying I was sinning if I get an abortion and that I'm gonna regret it. She was saying stuff like if I get a surgical one I might not make it out alive. She said that someone had half a baby left inside her after. She was ignoring what I was saying and just kept saying all this stuff. She had us sit down and talk with her like that was the real place. She just kept saying way too much stuff and my mom was like come on we gotta leave. It was really scary because sometimes people are not ready to have a baby but this was a really bad experience. My experience was really bad for the first time because the things she was saying were uncalled for, then seeing all the stuff in the office scared me as well. A lot of the rooms were dark and there was a basket of little baby dolls on the floor. If I didn't have my mom with me they might have changed my mind because I was scared. We asked her where is the appointment for the abortions and she said there's no abortion center here…”

Alisha*, 26, Volunteer visit to a crisis pregnancy center in Central Connecticut
"She reviewed all my medical history, prior pregnancies, what medications I take, she asked if I was in an abusive relationship. Then she was like ok we're gonna do the pregnancy test now. She showed me the two lines and said I was pregnant. We were all silent for two minutes and she didn't say anything. When you go upstairs it's a nice area with two desks and couches, but when you walk through that room there's a whole set up, a whole OB-GYN like an exam room. It looked like a real clinic. It looked legit. I asked, "What are my options? I don't really want to be pregnant?" So then she mostly said adoption, parenting, and then said well there's abortion. But she kept saying you have a lot of time, you don't need to make a decision now, she didn't really want to talk about abortion. I asked her about the abortion pill, so then she started off neutral and told me about the abortion pill. She said you could be laying in your bed and bleed all over and you could see the baby in your bed. She couldn't pronounce any of the medications. She was looking things up on her phone and she was texting people during the appointment.

Eventually she got mad when I asked about abortion. She just kept telling me I had time to make a decision and not to worry and that I didn't need to decide now. She just kept saying you have time. You have time to decide. When I was leaving they wanted me to make another appointment. Then they asked if they could pray for me.”
J., Volunteer who visited a crisis pregnancy center in Southeastern Connecticut

“My fiancé and I went to a pregnancy center in the New London area. On the homepage of the website it says “Considering Abortion? Care Net is your first step.” The website also says they offer free pregnancy services such as ultrasounds, pre-termination evaluations, information about options, free pregnancy tests. It says everything is professional and confidential and you can schedule your appointment online. The waiting room area had usual pamphlets like any doctors office. My fiancé told the lady in there she thought she might be pregnant and asked for a pregnancy test. When the receptionist called her in, they did not want me to come in the room and said it was against policy, but because my fiance insisted, they allowed me to come in. The back rooms were small. There was an exam room and a few other small rooms that looked like conference rooms. The counseling room we went into was small. The counselor was super friendly and welcoming at first. The conversation started out normal as she asked us what brought us in today, etc.

Throughout the beginning of the appointment I really felt welcomed and comfortable. However the more comfortable we got, the more personal and then aggressive the counselor got with us. She asked my fiance what she was thinking of doing about the pregnancy and she said she wanted to terminate the pregnancy. The counselor stated that they didn’t do those there but they had counseling to help her make the decision. She then told us a personal story about how she had been raped 20+ years ago and had gotten an abortion. She said getting the abortion was the worst decision of her life and she regretted it everyday and even had PTSD because of it. She then told us how abortions can make it hard for women to conceive again, and that they offered services at their center to help mothers support the babies through the first year.

She also advised my fiance NOT to tell anyone she was pregnant until she made an additional appointment at the center to further discuss her options. She was very persistent about my fiance not telling anyone she was pregnant. The longer we were in there and the more my fiancé vocalized her opinions on not being able to have a baby at her age, the more aggressive the counselor got about her not having an abortion.

The counselor wanted us to wait at the center as they were going to call the nurse in that day to give an ultrasound. We said she had to work and they replied with the nurse could be there in 30 minutes as she was not in on the day we went. They were very persistent about wanting us to see the nurse that day.

Overall the longer we were there the more uncomfortable I felt. I hope that when someone is looking for a real reproductive health clinic they do not end up at this place. No woman should have to go through all of this just to get a pregnancy test and possibly make medical decisions like abortion.

Sierra*, 25, Patient deceived and intercepted in the greater Hartford area

“First off I didn't know where I was going. We opened the door of the wrong building and this lady was standing there and came up and forcibly was trying to give me her papers. I said, “No thank you” and she goes "we're offering $50 and free ultrasounds" and I told her "no thank you I don't need that" and again she goes "well we're offering $50 here" like $50 was going to make a difference in my life. Then she walked behind us all the way to the door of the other building.”
Anna*, 22, Volunteer who visited a crisis pregnancy center

“The first thing I noticed when we pulled up to our assigned fake clinic in the New Haven area was its location. It was almost adjacent to Yale University, and my friend and I had trouble finding the clinic because it was tucked away behind a legitimate OB-GYN. We parked in “patient parking.” It felt like we were walking up to a doctor’s office. Of course, I knew that this could not have been further from the truth, and that the Crisis Pregnancy Center had purposefully placed itself next to a real OB-GYN, near students who would not know the difference, and without putting in much effort to distinguish themselves from the legitimate medical office with which they shared a building.

I was going undercover as a college student who had just found out that she was pregnant, was in an unstable relationship with the father, and was young and naïve enough to not have a full understanding of birth control, abortion, and the manipulative tactics of CPCs like the one I was attending. The website for the CPC offered services like “abstinence and STD education,” and under “Pregnancy Choices,” they said they could give me “Abortion information and medical facts.” I wanted to see what sort of “education” they could offer me.

When we finally found the CPC, we entered what might have been a child’s playroom. There were piles of baby shoes in a corner, and baby dolls propped up everywhere. Poems and prayers lined the walls, as well as “informational material” letting us know when my baby could feel pain or had ten toes. I noted that a big poster told me my baby could feel comfort and pain at just ten weeks, when I know for a fact that pain nociceptors are not even developed until twenty weeks, and the ability to understand pain signals is not developed until full term. I went in to the bathroom (which was, of course, equipped with a changing table and a baby doll at the ready) to take my free pregnancy test, at which point I noticed a poem entitled “My Silent Plea” on top of the toilet, which described a violent image of abortion, obviously meant to guilt-trip women in my very situation. After my pregnancy test, I went back into the waiting room for “counseling.” What struck most about the “counseling” was the blatant lack of knowledge on the part of the CPC worker. The worker told me that pregnancies were “not as strong” until about the ninth or tenth week, so I should “come in again” for further testing, which seemed like a tactical delay so that I would wait longer to potentially get an abortion. Even if I wanted to keep the baby, this would have also delayed me in getting prenatal care. She insisted that she, as a Christian, was against abortion and birth control—as though you can’t be a Christian and for reproductive health. She told me and my friend that abortions and birth control were “dangerous,” and that “lots of students” can “easily” raise a child and be in school full-time. In addition, the counseling was conducted in the waiting room without any privacy whatsoever, and a family with three small children sat nearby while we discussed tense, emotional topics. It seemed incredibly inappropriate and there was not even a semblance of confidentiality.

I thought the experience was deeply disturbing, and I was shocked at how little a “counselor” could know. It was an obvious example of misinformation and deception, as well as purposeful delaying in decision-making. I imagined how scared and confused I would be if I had just come to the CPC without my background knowledge, because not only did it seem like it was a part of an actual OB-GYN office, it also offered contradictory advice. They gave me many informational pamphlets that stressed adoption over abortion, saying that in adoption my “pregnancy would end with life,” but in abortion, my pregnancy would “end in death,” and I might feel “shame or guilt,” and I “will remember taking a life.” This was a horrible facility meant to trick people who don’t know specifically that it is a fake clinic. This should never be something experienced by any woman.”

“Last year, I visited a crisis pregnancy center in Western Connecticut. For this crisis pregnancy center, some of the results from an online search of “abortion waterbury” say “Abortion and your health. Thinking about pregnancy or abortion? Facing an unplanned pregnancy but not sure about abortion? We can help you find answers.” Especially when someone is unsure and nervous about where to go, these ads are very overwhelming. At the time of this visit I was volunteering my time to help NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut with research about these centers. It’s very easy to be deceived by these centers-- you can find their ads on buses, billboards, and especially while searching online.

When I called to make an appointment, I was directly connected to the center’s weekend hotline. The woman answering the phone was very vague and didn’t ask many questions. She just told me I could come in for a pregnancy test and “talk through my options.” She didn’t say much about what was offered there but on the website it said “Client Services, Pregnancy Information, Pregnancy Choices, Sexual Health, Abortion & Health Risks.” I could see how someone would be unsure.

I arrived at the crisis pregnancy center with a friend who came to support me. We were instructed to come to the back door and were invited in by a woman. We walked through the kitchen, with lots of religious pictures and decorations. At this point, the woman asked for my support person to stay in the kitchen while we talked. I emphasized that I was scared and wanted my friend with me. We went back and forth again, but eventually she agreed to let me have my support person come with me into a living room with a desk that the woman sat behind. While I took a pregnancy test, she talked to my friend and got more information about me and the situation. I told her that I was currently single, and that the father did not know about the pregnancy. My friend added that she did not approve of him, and the woman scoffed and said, “Well, you probably should have figured that out before you got into bed with him, huh?” I was shocked she would say something like that during what was supposed to be a counseling session.

When the test came back positive, she told me about the joys of motherhood, even though I was clearly distressed, and pulled out a few dolls that were supposed to be the size of a fetus at 8 weeks and said “These babies are what your baby looks like right now.” The dolls she pulled out were clearly bigger and more detailed than an actual fetus at 8 weeks. I kept saying, “I do not want to be pregnant. I can’t have a baby.” She said that she would only talk to me about having the baby and adoption. She never said the word abortion and told me that if that’s what I decided to do, I’d have to live with my decision for the rest of my life and would disappoint my family if I made the wrong choice. She was very shameful and told me to think about what my grandparents would think about my decision. At some point during the conversation, the woman began to direct all conversation to my friend instead of talking to me or answering my questions. She said to my friend, “Clearly she’s too overwhelmed by this news to think straight or absorb anything, so I’ll just talk to you.” I felt unheard and patronized by the whole experience, like I was only a body, not a whole person.

We left with lots of brochures on parenting and adoption, as well as a list of catholic hospitals and doctors offices they referred to. The woman told my support person to call if I needed more support or wanted to be put in touch with any of their parenting programs or adoption services.

After this experience, I feel horrified knowing that women facing unintended pregnancy might come to this crisis pregnancy center seeking nonjudgmental support and accurate information. Instead, it was my experience that women receive biased, inaccurate, and oftentimes demeaning counseling. If I was a woman in that situation, I could have easily believed what the woman told me.
If I was a woman in that situation, I could have easily believed what the woman told me. If a woman is specifically looking for information about abortion or reproductive healthcare I would be scared about what is told to her in this crisis pregnancy center. When someone is seeking all-options counseling from a legitimate clinic, they shouldn’t have to go through this confusion and shame.

Tara*, 21, Woman who was deceived by a crisis pregnancy center in central Connecticut.
“In 2015, I was 19 and there was a possibility that I could've been pregnant. I had just enrolled in college and I was scared, helpless, and confused! I didn't know what to do, who to talk to or where to go. I lived in Middletown, CT my whole life and during my commutes to our local grocery store, I would often pass the ABC Women's Center. They would frequently advertise that they offer free pregnancy tests and moral support. I thought this would be a health clinic that could help me in my situation.

When I walked in, I was greeted by their receptionist, she asked why I was there, and I told her. They asked for my ID and information. She provided me the supplies I needed to perform the pregnancy test. Afterwards, I brought into a room that was like a counselor's office. A few minutes passed by, and another women entered the room and indicated that my test results were negative! I was so relieved!

The women then started asking me what was my religious affiliation was and if I was considering birth control. I explained to her that I did not identify with any religion and I wanted to explore my birth control options. The lady then began to hand me different pamphlets on religion and a lecture me on how the only form of birth control is abstinence and that all other forms can harm my body. She made me feel uncomfortable and guilty that I was sexually active. I will never go to this crisis pregnancy center ever again. Women shouldn't be confused about what kind of help they can get at a pregnancy center.”

Emergency Room Physician, Hartford area
“Betty was a young woman whom I met in the Emergency Room for abdominal pain. Her pregnancy was visibly showing and her aunt was convinced she had a tumor. She revealed to me that she was hiding her pregnancy from her family and had been seeing a women’s center, a crisis pregnancy center, in Hartford because she wanted a termination. She told me she had gone every few weeks for last few months, but was not given any instructions on how to have an abortion yet. Performing her ultrasound, I was able to determine her fetus was 25 weeks and 4 days, past the legal limit for abortion. I had to tell her that even though she had clearly indicated her desire to terminate her desires had been realized months prior, now she had no choice in the matter because she had been misled and pushed past the legal limit. As I watched tears stream down her face, my heart broke that HER life and dreams had not been valued and she was blocked from getting the medical care she needed.”
REFERENCES


“No Woman Should Have To Face a Pregnancy Decision Alone.” Abcwomenscenter.org, ABC Women's Center, abcwomenscenter.org/. Screenshot retrieved March 2018.