UNDERSTANDING PATIENT EXPERIENCES WITH OBSTETRIC CARE IN CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

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Women’s reproductive and ob-gyn care can be restricted and shaped in surprising ways by religious doctrine that governs care provided at Catholic health care facilities. Catholic hospitals treat one in nine acute care patients in the U.S., while employing physicians and treating patients of all faiths. While the explicit religious policies and studies about physicians working in Catholic hospitals indicate that obstetric and reproductive patient care can and has been compromised, the patient’s perspective represents an enormous gap in the literature.

For this study, we interviewed 22 women about their experiences of receiving care in a Catholic hospital that is typically prohibited or restricted by Catholic doctrine. Our goal was to learn about a diverse set of women’s experiences with this care, as well as how restrictions were communicated to them, and what, as a result, they understood about the policies. The restricted or prohibited care that women discussed included sterilization (tubal-ligation and hysterectomy), abortion, miscarriage, contraception, fertility treatment, medication for polycystic ovarian syndrome, and an IUD removal while pregnant. Some of the women did receive their desired treatment, though most in our study experienced delay or denial of treatment in some way. Analysis is ongoing.