

US Catholic Hospitals Betray Mission: Sterilization and abortion offered in Texas

In a study of hospital discharge data for the State of Texas, researchers found that Catholic hospitals reported at least 9,684 cases of sterilizations and 39 legally induced abortions from 2000-2003. While sterilizations and abortions are legal in the US, they are considered immoral by the Catholic Church since they harm the body and violate human dignity. The identified hospitals and their respective healthcare systems are operated by religious orders of the Catholic Church who according to the Church's Canon Law are dedicated to the service of God and the whole Church, and subject to the authority of the Church (1). In their activities, they must faithfully observe the mission of their founders ([Can. 578](#)) and cooperate with the local bishop. In the United States, they are expected by the local bishops to operate according to the [Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Healthcare](#) (2001). The study shows that all six US Catholic hospital systems operating in Texas not only defy these directives, they betray the purpose and spirit of their founders. More importantly, they betray the trust of Catholics and the secular public, especially the poor, who depend upon them for humane and ethical care. Because these six systems are nationwide, what has been happening in Texas could be occurring throughout the country. Also to be considered are the practices of other Catholic health systems throughout the country.

The researchers collected and analyzed the Texas data to inform the public of the practices of Catholic healthcare systems and to foster public accountability for the religious sisters who run these systems in the name of Christ and the Church. The data from the study is made available on this website to all who wish to further investigate the situation. It includes records from Catholic hospitals in Texas that present either explicit violations of Catholic directives or might represent violations. The concern of the study has been to examine solid documentary evidence of violations and to avoid confidential information, morally ambiguous procedures, or personal cases.

The data is abstracted from the hospital inpatient discharge data reported to the [Texas Health Care Information Collection Center for Health Statistics](#). The Texas Legislature requires the Center to collect healthcare charges, utilization data including diagnosis and procedures, and outcome data for all patients for the purposes of promoting cost-effective, quality health care. All Texas hospitals except for very small or rural ones must submit quarterly data on all inpatient discharges. Hospitals assign unique patient and physician identifiers so that records may be submitted without violating patient and physician confidentiality. The data is compiled quarterly into public use data files that may be purchased for research or analytical purposes. The cost at \$4,600 per year is out of reach of most individuals and is the reason this study only covers 2000 to 2003.

An Excel file, [TCH.xls](#) (Texas Catholic Hospitals), containing abstracted patient records may be downloaded and examined by those who wish to do further investigation. The researchers organized the data and simplified its presentation to make it more accessible to those individuals not familiar with hospital discharge data. They added macros to enable the data to be viewed in various ways. The opening tab of the file explains how to use the macros. There are also links to the hospital systems, religious orders who own the hospitals, and dioceses in which the hospitals or religious orders are located. The researchers are available to assist interested parties in Texas and other states to collect and analyze similar data.

An independent review of [TCH.xls](#) with a one page data summary and an assessment of its implications for the practice of Catholic healthcare in the United States and for the necessary adaptation of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Healthcare* have also been posted. The review has been widely distributed to church leaders and the media. The [review data summary](#), [review narrative](#), and [distribution memo](#) may be downloaded from these links. This review is not the work of the researchers

who gathered the data. It is included here to provide an indication of the potential impact of the study. The researchers do not wish to endorse any particular agenda for resolving the crisis that the data reveals.

Methodology Used in Analyzing Texas Hospital Data

The TCH.xls file was created by a research group including a biostatistician and medical ethicist as a means to facilitate open access to public records containing data from Catholic hospitals in the state of Texas. It is not an advocacy position about what needs to be done, but hopefully simply serves to increase transparency and accountability about procedures performed in Catholic hospitals.

Only Catholic hospital inpatient data was extracted from the Texas Public Use Data File for inclusion in the analysis. The Catholic hospitals were identified from the 2006 state list of acute care hospitals in Texas, the hospitals listed in the Official Catholic Directory, and the websites of the identified health care systems and respective religious orders responsible for their operation. Only one acute care Catholic hospital located in Brenham is not included since it is not required to report because of its rural location.

For the identified Catholic hospitals, inpatient data was obtained for the years 2000 through 2003. The state records are coded according to the International Classification of Diseases guidelines ([ICD-9-CM](#)) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)). A database of the codes obtained from the CDC's [National Center for Health Statistics](#) is included in the provided files. The researchers responsible for TCH.xls searched for all records which had codes indicating sterilizations, contraceptive procedures, legally induced abortions, and termination of pregnancy. A complete listing of all codes used in searching the records is also included in the data file.

Only those fields from the [Texas Public Use Data File](#) relevant to the research are included in the extracted file. Each patient record in the extracted file includes the year and quarter of the discharge, the hospital ID, the name of the hospital, the sex of the patient, the admitting ICD-9-CM diagnostic code, eight additional fields for diagnostic codes, the principle surgical procedure ICD-9-CM code, five additional fields for surgical and obstetrical procedures, and the unique patient record ID. Fields in the records regarding charges, physician identification, and other non-relevant information were excluded from the compilation. It should be noted that the hospital identification codes are unique identifiers assigned to the hospitals by the state. These numbers sometimes change although the hospital remains the same.

A brief note on the selected codes for the search may be helpful. The V25.2 diagnostic code specifically indicates that sterilization for contraceptive purposes is to be done through interruption of the fallopian tubes or the vas deferens. There are distinct diagnostic codes for illegal, legal, or unspecified induced abortions. Only legally induced abortions have been considered. Also, there are procedures such as dilation and curettage (D&C) which can be used either "following delivery or abortion" or "for termination of pregnancy" and are given separate codes to distinguish these very different purposes. Only the codes specifically "for termination of pregnancy" were used for the search. The user is advised to view all the diagnostic and procedural codes in a patient record to gain a clearer understanding of particular cases. A complete list of the codes and their descriptions are included in TCH.xls.

The data for each hospital is summarized on the Hospitals tab. Totals for each code are given. While some records may contain duplicate codes, the totals only count the record once. All the records included in each total number may be seen by double clicking on the total.

References:

Canon Law Society. (2003). "http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/___P1Y.HTM" [Code of Canon Law](#) .
Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2001). "<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/directives.shtml>" [Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Healthcare](#) , *Fourth Edition*. Washington D.C.: USCCB.

Texas Department of State Health Services. (2006). [Texas Health Care Information Collection Center for Health Statistics](#)