

Sex kills, anti-abortion clinic tells women

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A clinic in Dublin claimed that continuing with a pregnancy could protect women against breast cancer



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Two unregulated crisis pregnancy agencies with connections to Irish pro-life groups have been caught giving misleading “advice” about the consequences of abortion, having sex and using contraception.

A new undercover investigation by *The Times* has secretly recorded counsellors at the Ask Majella crisis pregnancy agency claiming that abortion causes breast cancer and can increase a woman’s chances of losing all of her reproductive organs. They also said that contraception was dangerous and women could “die” from having sex.

A second undercover investigation at Gianna Care, a crisis pregnancy service that started as a Youth Defence activist

claimed to offer “the truth”.

Gianna Care and Ask Majella are unregulated crisis pregnancy agencies based in Dublin. Both have been exposed six months after *The Times* carried out an undercover investigation into another clinic, the Women’s Centre at 9 Berkeley Street in Dublin, which revealed it was telling women that abortion causes breast cancer and could turn them into child abusers.

At that time, Simon Harris, the health minister, pledged to crack down on such agencies but no new legislation has been introduced.

In a statement issued in response to the new cases, Mr Harris said: “Women who are experiencing a crisis pregnancy and are seeking support can be in great distress, and the health information they ask for should be just that, not an opportunity to mislead them”. The Department of Health said the minister had committed to a “sizeable and important body of work” on the issue.

In the latest exposé, an undercover reporter was told at the Ask Majella agency that terminating a pregnancy was the same as a mother pushing her child in front of a moving car, and that every time she saw a baby having had a termination she would feel like she was being stabbed. She was also told that an abortion would take away the “light” in her eyes.

Human Life International (Ireland), a religious anti-abortion campaign group, runs the Ask Majella crisis pregnancy agency.

Over the course of an hour-long appointment with a reporter posing as a pregnant 20-year-old woman last month, two counsellors at the Ask Majella service claimed that: abortion causes breast cancer and continuing with a pregnancy protects against breast cancer.

was dangerous. They claimed a crisis pregnancy was a “blessing” as it could lead to a woman reassessing the risks of contracting a fatal sexually transmitted infection from having sex. They also said abortion could cause the loss of reproductive organs and a double mastectomy and made the claim that terminating a pregnancy is the same as pushing a child in front of a moving car.

Ask Majella and Gianna Care have both said that they are separate agencies, although they hold appointments in the same office at 46a Dorset Street, Dublin. The address is the registered business address of Gianna Care, which was set up by Youth Defence volunteers. Youth Defence has said that it is a separate organisation to Gianna Care.

A spokeswoman for Ask Majella said the crisis pregnancy agency had been renting the room on a “professional and independent basis”.

Family & Life, another large anti-abortion campaign group which presented to the citizens’ assembly considering abortion law last month, has been funding Gianna Care.

American studies from the 1990s claimed to have shown an association between abortion and breast cancer. Larger and more recent studies have disproved any link. Ask Majella exaggerated the relationship between a woman’s slight reduction in exposure to hormones produced while pregnant and her chances of getting breast cancer.

Ask Majella has claimed to have talked 500 of the 2,000 women it counselled over the past 15 years into continuing pregnancies. The undercover reporter was given a badge which claimed to be the “exact size” of a foetus’ feet at ten weeks’ gestation, literature which detailed the size of the foetus at each week’s gestation and a prayer leaflet of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is the patron saint of the unborn. The agency directed the reporter to websites with graphic images of abortion.

also supports conversion “therapy” for gay people, a practice which believes that gay people can become heterosexual.

During the appointment, counsellors appeared to reference the previous investigation into The Women’s Centre by *The Times*.

The Times exposes more unregulated clinics

“We were being accused in our clinics of exaggerating the effects of abortion and giving negative, you know, saying and exaggerating how bad it is,” a counsellor said. “[The abortion industry] are the ones lying. Because they don’t want the truth to come out.” The counsellors suggested information linking abortion and breast cancer was being suppressed by the media.

In 2004, Ask Majella bought a €45,000 ultrasound scanner because it believes that if a woman looks at an sonographic picture of her foetus it will be harder for her to terminate the pregnancy. The tactic is adopted from American anti-abortion groups.

Counsellors tried to pressure the undercover reporter into having the scan. “It would confirm . . . in one sense you’d have to

Gianna Care uses a similar tactic and often gives women a picture of the scan on a USB stick to take away with them.

“We deal with girls from all walks of life, all different stages, all different backgrounds; there’s always the regret that they didn’t kept their baby, but there’s never the regret that they had their baby,” the Gianna Care counsellor said. “The other thing I always find as well which is true is that it’s not a lifetime condition, it’s not a diagnosis of cancer or something like that. It is a natural thing that your body is designed for. You know what I mean? So, in terms of, just looking at it from that point of view, it’s good news. It’s a good thing.”

Independent studies have consistently shown that the majority of women do not regret their abortion.

Both Gianna Care and Ask Majella use aggressive tactics to ensure they target women who are already considering terminating a pregnancy.

In 2014, Ask Majella reported in its annual returns that it was increasing spending on sponsored internet ads which ensured it was one of the first Google results for women seeking information on legal abortion services. “Google ads are live and huge increase in our crisis pregnancy calls,” it said. Previously, it had taken out full page advertisements in a number of regional phone books.

Youth Defence volunteers who held vigils outside a legitimate crisis pregnancy agency set up Gianna Care originally so that the group would have an office to take women it had approached outside a pro-choice agency.

The Times asked Youth Defence about its connections with Gianna Care. Youth Defence said this newspaper was being “belligerent” and “unprofessional”.

we do not provide pregnancy counselling services in Dorset Street,” a spokesperson said.

A solicitor wrote to *The Times* on behalf of Gianna Care and said the agency does not seek to “judge or provoke unnecessary anxiety.” He said the service was not connected to Youth Defence.

Last year, David Manly, a director at Family and Life, ran a campaign to raise €15,000 for Gianna Care in a “pro-life emergency” appeal. Writing in the Catholic publication *Alive!* in May 2016, Mr Manly said: “One of our major programmes assists women facing crisis pregnancies.”

Mr Manly told *The Times* that fundraising for Gianna Care was part of his organisation’s work to help women in crisis pregnancies, and if he had any evidence that it was a rogue agency his organisation would not work with it. He said it had no relationship with Ask Majella. “Lying to anyone is unjustified, especially in the case at issue,” he said.

Patrick McCrystal, the executive director at Human Life International (Ireland), said it was the responsibility of every baptised Catholic to “rescue those unjustly sentenced to death”. He claimed his organisation was telling the truth and the media was lying about abortion. “It is a sin to lie to these women, many of whom are in a fearful, vulnerable state,” he said.



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