

Abortion rights topic of speech

Tasha Eichenseher
Oregon Daily Emerald

Nightmares and that dank, dark hallway" that led to the office of an abortionist practicing illegally, haunt Sharry even 30 years after her operation.

Sharry, whose last name was not revealed, described in a letter how no professional doctors in the mid-1950's would terminate her unwanted pregnancy, which was the result of a brutal rape. She had no choice but to risk her life for an abortion when she was 23, Sharry wrote.

Kathryn Kolbert, vice-president of the New York City-based Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, read Sharry's letter in an emotional speech at the University Law Center Friday. She used the letter to illustrate how women in the past have been denied reproductive rights by the law.

Now women's reproductive rights are being threatened by violence directed at abortion providers, Kolbert said in her keynote address.

The violence, as well as anti-abortionist politicians, is threatening to bring us back to a time of back-alley abortionists and dirty scalpels, Kolbert said.

Despite great strides made in the 1973 supreme court case Roe

vs. Wade, membership in pro-choice organizations has dropped since 1967, along with the number of hospitals in non-urban areas providing abortion services, according to Kolbert.

Killing abortion clinic employees, harassing doctors who perform abortions and bombing abortion facilities are condoned by people who associate the violence with a "war" between anti-abortionists and pro-life supporters, Kolbert said.

"I reject that description of what is happening," said Kolbert, who paralleled the violence directed at abortion providers to wife battering instead. It is all part of a plan to control women, she explained.

Battered women and abortionists are caught in the same cycle of self-blame, shame and feeling of powerlessness, she said.

People should not feel ashamed about providing and receiving abortions, Kolbert said. "In my view it is a necessary medical practice."

Because of consolidated health care agreements, such as the proposed Sacred Heart merger, women may not receive all of the information and services an obstetrician-gynecologist or family practitioner should provide, Kolbert said.

Kolbert said she was happy to

see the story. "Sacred Heart OKs abortion pact" in Friday's *The Register-Guard*, which stated the merger would allow doctors to provide abortion services. She wants to read the fine print, however, before deciding if the pact is helping women obtain their full reproductive rights, she said.

What is Kolbert's solution to the threat posed by the anti-abortion movement?

Keep fighting, she said. "The passage of anti-choice ballot measures, parental notification laws and, most alarming, the appointment of anti-choice judges, are frightening signs that the minority voice is being heard and taken seriously," Sharry wrote.

"But what about the other voices. An overwhelming majority of Americans - about eight out of 10 - are pro-choice ... Listen to their voices."

Kolbert, who spoke at "Women Influencing the Law," a University sponsored by the University School of Law and the Women's Law Forum, was counsel of record in the 1992 Supreme Court Case, *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania vs. Casey*. The decision in that case reinforced the *Roe vs. Wade* decision.

Panels discuss women's legal needs

Jennifer Carr
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Law professors, practitioners, state legislative representatives and women's rights activists offered encouragement to women and criticized the legal system for not being responsive enough to the legal needs of women in our society at a conference sponsored by the Women's Law Forum at the University last weekend.

A speech delivered by Kathryn Kolbert, a lawyer and vice president of the Center for Reproductive Law & Policy in New York, started the conference on Friday. On Saturday, panel discussions focused on free speech and security at abortion clinics, domestic violence and whether legal professions require women to become more like men in order to succeed.

Jude Hanzo, director of the Feminist Women's Health Centers in Eugene and Portland, argued that although our governments have recognized the violence and problems abortion clinics face, they are not taking the escalating violence at clinics seriously enough.

"A lot more needs to be done," Hanzo said. "Clinics all over the country are under siege."

Hanzo discussed the events that led her to obtain an injunction against anti-abortion protesters at the Portland clinic. The injunction created a 25-foot buffer zone around the front entrance to the clinic, which increased the ability of patients to enter and leave without being accosted by protesters.

Hanzo said her clinic was targeted every day by anti-abortion activists who did more than just carry picket signs and yell obscenities at patients. The clinic's electrical and phone wires were cut, a fire was started in its dumpster, its windows were continuously broken and assaults, trespassing and vandalism almost became daily occurrences. One patient almost died while paramedics carried her into an ambulance.

"We had to look all around the building before we started work," Hanzo said. "This was a daily thing, and it was not uncommon to find something."

Panelists argued that our court systems not only fail to recognize women's rights at abortion clinics

but also fail to protect women from physical and mental abuse.

Caroline Forell, a University law professor, presented a video by Sarah Buel, a prosecutor, law professor and survivor of spousal abuse and spousal beatings. Buel's video said society needs to stop blaming women for staying in abusive relationships and needs to start providing women with information and services they need to escape.

Buel said women go back to their partners over and over again because they don't know what else to do. Society has not made it possible for women to escape.

Shelters, financial aid and child care are just some of the basic services our communities need to provide to abused women.

Forell said she hopes that something will be done about domestic violence now that our current federal and state governments have put crime high on their political agendas.

Denise Fjordbeck, an attorney with the Oregon Department of Justice, Environmental and Commercial Litigation Division, argued that not only do women face discrimination in the law but face discrimination as legal professionals as well.

"Things have gotten easier for women in the legal profession but not better," Fjordbeck said. "The number of women lawyers is increasing and the number of women in judicial and leadership positions has skyrocketed."

Fjordbeck argued, however, that although women are increasingly present in legal professions, they do have to become more like men in order to succeed.

"You need to be tough, calm, cool, collected, strong, work with men and work twice as hard as a male lawyer," Fjordbeck said. "Men lawyers will not consider you to be the same or as good as them, but you can intimidate them if you try to be."

One difficulty in measuring the level of success is women and men consider success to be different things. A current survey, focusing on law students at the University, concluded that women associate success with family and community, whereas with men success means money, position and power.

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