

## 104th CONGRESS

# House members try to change rule on abortion training

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Prompted by doctors who claim that a pro-choice minority at the top of their profession is trying to force medical students to perform a procedure many of them find objectionable, pro-life House members want to forbid making abortion training a condition for the accreditation of medical schools.

"I don't want to see Congress micromanage medical education, [but] abortion is different. It's not like any other medical procedure," Dr. Anthony Levatino, who teaches in an obstetrics and gynecology program in Albany, N.Y., said yesterday in congressional testimony.

Pro-life House members are planning to introduce legislation that would nullify a requirement drafted in February by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), which would force medical schools to offer abortion training

as part of their obstetrics and gynecology programs or risk losing accreditation.

Other doctors testified against the legislation yesterday, saying that Congress is trying to politicize the medical profession.

A loss of accreditation would mean a medical school would be ineligible to receive some federal funding, as well as professional prestige, making it harder to recruit students. If given final approval by ACGME, as is expected within two months, the rule would go into affect Jan. 1.

The House subcommittee on oversight and investigations heard testimony yesterday from doctors representing ACGME, and those opposed to its proposal.

Dr. Robert D'Alessandri, chair designate of ACGME, said professional organizations must be allowed to determine standards for their professions. He said it would be a disaster for Congress to determine what could or could not be

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taught in medical schools.

"It would be almost as bad as the ACGME passing laws for the country," he said.

But subcommittee chairman Rep. Peter Hoekstra, Michigan Republican and chief sponsor of the bill, said the issue is necessarily political because it involves the fate of federal funding. He pointed out that before ACGME's decision to mandate abortion training, medical schools had the right to choose whether or not to teach the procedure.

"You have made a political decision," he told ACGME representatives. "It's not Congress moving into your box. You have moved out

of your sphere and into ours, and that's why we're having these hearings today."

Mr. Hoekstra was supported by other doctors, who testified that ACGME's leaders are attempting to make up for the declining number of doctors willing to provide abortion services by coercing medical students to become comfortable with a procedure many of them find abhorrent.

"This mandate has the clear purpose of 'mainstreaming' abortion practice within the medical community and presenting to the American public the totally false impression that all physicians believe that abortion is just another

medical procedure, when clearly it is not," said Dr. Pamela Smith, director of obstetrics and gynecology training at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Chicago.

Said Dr. Edward Hannigan, a University of Texas medical professor: "The intent, openly stated, is to make sure all trainees have bloodied their hands during training, in the hope that they will lose their reluctance to make this procedure a part of their clinical practice."

But Dr. Frank W. Ling, a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, said all in his specialty should know how to perform abortions in case they are required to do so in an emergency.

Besides, he said, attending physicians should be intimately familiar with the abortion process "in order to deal with the emotional and psychological issues" of women considering having an abortion.

Yet several doctors asserted that medical students learn how to evacuate uteruses as part of their standard training. ACGME insists that medical students receive experience inducing elective abortions.

Dr. D'Alessandri presented proposed changes in the original ACGME resolution, based on meetings with representatives of Catholic hospitals and medical schools, which forbid abortion training.

The new language gives programs and residents who object to abortion training the right opt out of it, but says residency programs "must not impede residents in their program who do not have a religious or moral objection from receiving education and experience in performing abortions at other institutions."

But Richard Dorflinger, spokesman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, called this concession "totally inadequate."