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## In Memorium: Dr. Barnett Slepian (1946-1998)

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*IN MEMORIAM***Dr. Barnett Slepian (1946 - 1998)**

Dr. Barnett Slepian was a physician, a husband, and a father of four boys. He was assassinated on October 23, 1998 in his own home because of his commitment to providing reproductive health care to women. Below are remarks from two close friends of Dr. Slepian's to remind us of his conviction and his life.

*Reflections by Marilyn Buckham, Buffalo GYN Womenservices and friend of Dr. Slepian:*

Barnett Slepian was a physician, a man of medicine, a healer. He provided comfort to the women of Buffalo. He delivered their babies, he brought joy to countless infertile couples, he saved the lives of women. As part of complete women's health care, he also performed abortions.

He was a husband—a father of four boys—he was my colleague and my friend. He loved his wife and proudly watched his four sons grow into bright young men. He was

a steadfast, loyal friend who loved life and lived it to the fullest. But all this was unimportant to the assassin who pulled the trigger.

Nothing about Barnett Slepian's life mattered except that he performed abortions, and for that his life was expendable.

The impetus behind the bullet was fuel by a hatred which has been festering for years and which has been allowed to grow unchecked. This death comes as the ultimate consequence of anti-choice intolerance which directs screaming epithets at frightened patients and taunts staff and doctors as butchers and murderers. The poisoned rhetoric they spew leaves nothing to the imagination. They threaten, they warn and ultimately, they end up causing a tragedy like the one which took my friend's life.

I have been helping women obtain safe, legal, medically sound abortions for over 25 years and I have seen the atmosphere of intolerance build outside the clinics and doctors' offices and homes. But what is more frightening is that the authorities who enforce the laws have looked the other way at the pushing and shoving on the sidewalks, have turned deaf ears to the picketers screaming outside the clinics and doctors' homes. We have looked to the courts and legislatures for help—and watched while uninformed conservatives chip and scrape away at *Roe v. Wade*.

This cannot be allowed to continue. Doctors must be allowed to practice medicine and not live in fear for their lives. This country cannot allow a fringe element to practice vigilante terrorism. We must not allow a cowardly minority to change the laws of our land through the scope of a sniper's rifle.

Freedom of choice laws passed by the United States government and upheld by the Supreme Court must be enforced, and anti-choice extremists who intimidate patients and threaten doctors must be made to pay for breaking them.

We will not close our doors, we will not stop providing this health care service to women. We will continue to help women because that's what Barnett devoted his life to, and that is what he would have wanted.

*Remarks by Glenn Edward Murray, lawyer and friend:*

We commemorate the stubborn courage and sacrifice of Bart Slepian and his family; that stubborn courage we admire, and yet so few are capable of; and we dedicate ourselves to protect reproductive freedom of choice and equal access to that endangered constitutional right.

And we grieve for the sacrifices of Bart Slepian and his family, we are proud of others on that path of freedom and equality; a path paved with his ultimate sacrifice, but endangered by the violence of fanatical terrorists.

We are proud of the doctors who share those principles. And we are inspired by the courage of Marilyn Buckham, her staff, and the escorts who refuse to surrender. We pledge ourselves to support those who won't take the safe path of submission.

As we dedicate ourselves to struggle against the common enemies of freedom of choice and equal rights, and as we dedicate ourselves to oppose violence and terrorism, let us with firm civility denounce the hypocrites who seek to demonize our doctors; yes, even those who offer hollow condolences; and let us with firm civility, not ask, but demand that our federal government protect our doctors, clinics and staff. And most of all, let us dedicate ourselves to the principles of freedom and equality that Bart Slepian lived and died for.

Let us never struggle alone, but shoulder to shoulder, brothers and sisters joined together, protecting freedom of choice and equal access to all, because that struggle is a testament that Bart Slepian did not die in vain.