

FIGO Human Rights and Women's Health Case 7

An Unwelcoming Birth Facility

At 36 weeks into her second pregnancy, A.R. is still undecided about where to deliver. A.R.'s midwife at the primary health center strongly encourages her to take up residence at a local hospital maternity waiting home where she delivered her first child. That delivery was complicated by a severe postpartum hemorrhage. A.R. is reluctant to make the 50-kilometer journey to the maternity home because of her previous experience with the hospital's religious policies.

The hospital is faith based but receives 20% of its annual funding from the state in return for providing public services. Hospital policy requires that all residents of the maternity home attend Sunday church services in the hospital's chapel, where only the religion of the hospital founders is recognized. A.R. does not practice that religion and finds the services disturbing. During her last pregnancy, she requested to be excused from Sunday services and was accused of being ungrateful for the free lodging and meals provided to her during her stay. Her pregnancy care was excellent but she felt humiliated by the experience.

This time she does not go to the maternity waiting home. At 38 weeks, A.R. goes into labor and within 3 hours she delivers a healthy daughter at the primary health center. She again bleeds profusely when the placenta is delivered. The clinic midwife gives her an injection of oxytocin and applies compression while waiting for the ambulance to arrive to take her to the hospital. Still bleeding, A.R. is transferred to the same district hospital where her first child was born. Upon arrival, the doctors pronounce her dead of exsanguination. The pastors give her body the blessings of the church and release it to her family.



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Questions for discussion

1. What are the medical issues of this case? Specifically:
 - a. What are the possible complications during the delivery of a woman who has a history of postpartum hemorrhage?
 - b. What is the appropriate antepartum management of a patient with previous postpartum hemorrhage?
 - c. What is the appropriate management of acute postpartum hemorrhage?
2. Using the Integrating Human Rights and Health Checklist, identify the human rights that were infringed in this case.
3. How did the policies for religious observation at the maternity home cause discrimination against A.R.? What were the health consequences of that discrimination?
4. What laws and/or policies of your state or country protect against discrimination in health care settings?
5. How might the system of maternity care offered by this district hospital become more inclusive and welcoming for women and continue to respect the wishes of the religious organization that finances the project?

