

## News in Brief

By Liz Townsend

### Killer of Mother and Unborn Baby Sentenced to Life in Prison

A Philadelphia man will spend his life in prison without parole after being convicted October 17 of two counts of first-degree murder for killing his girlfriend and unborn baby. Stephen Poaches, 27, strangled five-months-pregnant La'Toyia Figueroa, 24, after she refused to have an abortion, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Poaches avoided the death penalty by agreeing not to appeal the conviction, the Philadelphia Daily News reported.

Poaches killed Figueroa on July 18, 2005. "He asked her, and she said she would not have an abortion," assistant district attorney Carlos Vega said during closing arguments, according to the Inquirer. "What do you do? You plan to get rid of her."

A month-long search, led by Figueroa's father Melvin, ended when an informer led police to Poaches as he was exhuming the bodies of Figueroa and her baby from a shallow grave August 20, the Inquirer reported.

While Poaches admitted to police that he killed Figueroa, he insisted it was accidental, according to the Daily News. However, witnesses at the non-jury trial testified that Poaches wanted Figueroa to miscarry the baby, the Inquirer reported.

"To find your child the way they found my daughter's body is very hard," Melvin Figueroa told the Inquirer. "To hear that kind of testimony was very brutal. For Poaches, he deserves what he got."

### Adult Stem Cells Used in Heart Attack Trial

Two hospitals in Britain are participating in a clinical trial to determine if injecting stem cells from patients' own bone marrow immediately after heart attacks could prevent damage to the heart.

While research in Germany showed improvement when bone marrow cells were given to patients who had suffered heart attacks an average of six years before the study (see October NRL News), the British patients will receive an injection of cells into an artery within five hours of the heart attack, according to the Daily Mail.

"We believe that if we give it immediately, it can prevent damage," cardiologist John Martin of the British Heart Foundation told the London Times. "We will show whether it works in acute heart attack—and the treatment will involve no extra stay in hospital and virtually no extra cost."

The trials will take place at the London Chest Hospital and the London Heart Hospital. Doctors plan to treat 100 patients, half of whom will be given their own stem cells taken from their hips, and half will be given a placebo, the Times reported.

If the trial is a success, the treatment may be used across the country in National Health Service (NHS) hospitals, according to the Daily Mail.

"If we can demonstrate improvement in the quality of life of patients, then this will be a significant step forward in the treatment of heart disease," said Anthony Mathur, senior lecturer and consultant cardiologist at Barts and the London NHS Trust, according to the Times. "Because the stem cells are taken from the patient, there are minimal ethical issues surrounding this procedure. There is also less likelihood of rejection complications."

### **Abortion Clinic Removes Misleading Ad**

A New York abortion clinic removed its Yellow Pages ad under the heading "Abortion Alternatives" after a pregnancy help center filed a lawsuit charging it with misleading advertising.

Expectant Mother Care Pregnancy Centers, which provides women with true abortion alternatives in New York and New Jersey, discovered that A Bronx Women's Medical Pavilion, which runs clinics in the Bronx and Brooklyn called Dr. Emily Women's Health Center, had ads in Ambassador Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives" as well as "Abortion Providers." Under "providers," the ad included references to "gentle abortion" and "no-pain anesthesia" and "abortion pill for natural at-home experience," according to the Journal News.

However, the "Abortion Alternatives" section, supposed to include only those centers that "do not provide information and/or counseling on the attainment of abortion services nor do they provide abortion services," also included an ad for the Dr. Emily clinics, the Journal News reported. The ad in this section included no references to the clinics' abortion "services."

A Bronx Women's Medical Pavilion settled the lawsuit by agreeing to advertise only in the "providers" section. Its attorney attempted to dismiss the matter by calling it a "nuisance lawsuit ... the ads weren't bringing in great amounts of revenue and it wasn't worth fighting about, quite simply," said Galen Sherwin, a staff attorney with the Reproductive Rights Project of the New York Civil Liberties Union, according to the Journal News.

However, the head of Expectant Mother Care Pregnancy Centers called the settlement a victory for pro-lifers and for the truth. "I think it reflects the fact that they had absolutely no case," Chris Slattery told the Journal News. "There's no First Amendment right to outright fraud and deception."

Since the "alternatives" section comes alphabetically before "providers" in the Yellow Pages, Slattery told the Journal News that accurate listings are important because they reach a pregnant woman's eyes first. "Two-thirds of pregnant women who are considering abortion when they come to us eventually choose life," he said.

### **Disabled Children's Remains Found in German Mass Grave**

Officials in Menden, Germany, have discovered the remains of at least 51 people buried in a mass grave, including 22 disabled children. The grave dates from World War II, and authorities believe the children may have been killed between January 1944 and April 1945 as part of the Nazis' euthanasia program, according to the Associated Press (AP).

Many of the children's skeletons, believed to be newborns to seven-year-olds, showed signs of disabilities such as Down syndrome, the AP reported. The Central Office for Investigation of Nazi-era Crimes has begun an investigation to determine how the children died and whether their deaths were part of the Nazi program to kill those deemed "unfit."

German historian Harald Jenner estimates that up to 8,000 children died in "facilities for the disabled" during World War II, according to the AP. Jenner told the AP that not all the children were directly killed, but they may have died of neglect or starvation.

"There wasn't always an order to kill them," Jenner said. "The manager of a home might have simply received another 300 people to look after and the authorities said they couldn't provide any more food."

Prosecutor Ulrich Maass told the AP, "As long as we have even the slightest indication that the children were victims of the Nazi euthanasia program, we will keep on investigating." Maass said that he knows of three people who are still alive and who worked at nearby Wickede-Wimbern Hospital, including an administrator and a doctor, who will be interviewed.

"Of course there is the question of how we are to prove these crimes after all this time," Maass said, the AP reported. "If the children were poisoned, that will be practically impossible. Many patients were probably simply left to starve. In this case, it is impossible to prove who is guilty."

#### **Australian Abortionist Receives No Jail Time**

Australian abortionist Suman Sood, convicted in August of illegally giving abortion-inducing drugs to a woman who delivered the baby into a toilet, will not serve jail time but instead was released on a two-year "good behaviour bond," AAP reported.

Justice Carolyn Simpson rejected the prosecution request of jail time October 31 and instead required Sood to make a written promise not to break the law for two years.

Simpson dismissed the severity of Sood's actions. "I do not regard these offences as in any major way above the lower level of seriousness," Simpson said, according to The Australian. "I do not believe that imposing a heavier punishment on Ms. Sood is likely to add to the deterrent effect." The justice added that it was "extremely unlikely that she will ever practise medicine again," AAP reported.

New South Wales (NSW) Health Minister John Hatzistergos said that the government will consider an appeal of the light sentence. "We'll carefully review it and have discussions with the prosecuting authorities in relation to a potential appeal," he told ABC Radio.

In contrast to Simpson's view of Sood's actions, state medical officials have taken the case seriously. Sood, who was the first abortionist in New South Wales to be convicted on illegal abortion charges in 25 years, has been banned from practicing medicine for 10 years, AAP reported. The NSW Medical Tribunal acted October 6 after receiving 11 complaints about Sood since 1998.

"By reason of the respondent's serious flaws in ability and character, the tribunal has serious doubts that she will ever be regarded as a fit and proper person to practise medicine," the tribunal ruled, according to AAP.

The judge's decision to release Sood is "very surprising given the gravity of the offences," NSW Right to Life Association spokesperson David Cotton told AAP. Even if Sood will not practice again, Cotton added, the judge did not give sufficient consideration "to what she has already done."

### **Retrial Ordered for Blind Chinese Activist**

Chen Guangcheng, whose attempt to file a class-action lawsuit against Shandong province's forced abortion and sterilization program led to house arrest and a four-year prison sentence, will get a new trial. The Linyi Intermediate Court found October 30 that Chen's first trial "violated lawful defense procedures," according to the South China Morning Post. The retrial has not yet been scheduled.

"They do not order a retrial except in rare cases, and this means that the original decision was completely in error," Chen's lawyer Li Jinsong told the New York Times. "At this stage we could not have hoped for a better result."

Chen was sentenced August 24 to four years in prison for "intentionally damaging property and organising a mob to disrupt traffic," the Morning Post reported. According to his lawyers, Chen, blind since childhood, was under guard at the time of the alleged riot and physically unable to have led a "mob," according to the Times.

In addition, Chen's legal team was detained by police the night before the first trial and unable to attend. His lead attorney, Xu Zhiyong, was held for 22 hours, released only after the trial had ended, according to the Los Angeles Times. The court appointed two lawyers to represent Chen, but they were unfamiliar with his case and contributed nothing to his defense, the Morning Post reported.

Chen gained international attention when he documented complaints by villagers that officials in Shandong province forced women to have late-term abortions and sterilization if they exceeded China's one-child policy, according to the Associated Press (AP). Although the national government has officially declared that such coercion is illegal, some provincial officials continue to use such brutal measures to enforce the regulations on the local level, the AP reported.

Commentators have speculated that Chen's retrial is a response to negative publicity. "If mainland China wants to be seen as a responsible player on the international stage, it must first put its house in order," wrote Frank Ching in the Morning Post. "Beijing cannot afford to flout such basic international norms as the right of accused people to timely and confidential legal advice—and the right of lawyers to represent their clients without being intimidated and harassed by the government or its hired thugs."

### **Adult Stem Cells Treat Diabetes in Mice**

Adult stem cells derived from human bone marrow helped diabetic mice produce insulin, repairing their damaged pancreases and kidneys, according to a study published in the November 6 online Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"It's just become apparent over the past year that these bone marrow cells are stemlike and that there are several ways they can repair tissues," study co-author Darwin Prockop, director of the Tulane University's Center for Gene Therapy, told Bloomberg News. "The results may be dramatic."

Researchers gave 30 mice chemicals that damaged their pancreases and sharply reduced their insulin production, making them diabetic, Bloomberg News reported. The lack of insulin caused the mice's blood sugar to rise to dangerous levels. In humans, high blood sugar levels lead to vision loss, kidney failure, heart attacks, and other complications.

They then injected human stem cells into the mice's hearts. The cells traveled to the pancreas within two weeks. The mice's blood sugar levels soon began to fall and their pancreases regenerated, producing mouse insulin, according to Bloomberg News. The cells also helped repair damage to the mice's kidneys.

"These cells are remarkable," Prockop told Bloomberg News. "They're part of a natural repair system we all have, and all we're trying to do with our strategy is increase their levels."