

Doctor regrets his abortion work

Southland Hospital is likely to be performing abortions, reports Frances Wilkinson

Southland Hospital doctors and staff involved with abortion procedures could risk losing their value for human life and becoming disillusioned, says a leading former obstetrician.

Southland Hospital is expected to be licensed to perform abortions from July, a move which has resulted in a heated debate.

Dr Norman Maclean, who worked at Southland Hospital for almost 40 years before retiring in 2006, knows why it is stirring so much opinion.

He performed up to five abortions a week for two years when he began his specialist training, in Dundee, Scotland, under its National Health Service.

That experience resulted in a lifetime of regret, prompting him to return to New Zealand where he gave evidence at the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1977.

The laws, which came as a result of the inquiry, included that the unborn child should be protected and a termination could only be granted if the pregnancy posed a serious health risk to the mother, Dr Maclean said.

He said that until about 15 years ago, between five and 10 abortions

Abortion say

What do you think of the probability that terminations will be performed at Southland Hospital from next month?

Email: frances.wilkinson@stl.co.nz

were carried out "for very serious reasons" at Southland Hospital every year.

But with time, consultants certifying the abortions became disillusioned with the interpretation of the laws. And consultants, including Dr Maclean, stopped providing the service, he said.

"The whole job (of an obstetrician) is to do with saving mothers and babies and lives but termination involves taking life away," he said.

"It (performing an abortion) confuses you and it raises a whole load of issues. If you can tolerate that, you lose your sensitivity for the value of individual human life."

He said staff at Southland Hospital involved with termination procedures from July would have the choice to opt out of their involvement with abortions.

"The law clearly states that no one has an obligation to be

involved against their conscience," he said.

"These people have a right to say, 'look, this (abortion) goes against my morals'."

He could not argue with pro-choice groups, who said that operations needed to be offered as close as possible to where patients lived. The Southern District Health Board currently provides the service at Dunedin Hospital.

"I can't argue with that. I think operations should be done as near as possible but liberal abortions isn't a health issue. It's a social issue," he said.

Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand executive member Alison McCulloch said the introduction of abortion services at Southland Hospital would help lower the stress levels of mothers travelling to Dunedin Hospital for the procedure.

"That's (travelling long distances) not good for the health outcomes



Pro-life: Former Southland Hospital obstetrician and Right to Life patron Dr Norman Maclean with the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion New Zealand Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry 1977.

Photo: FRANCES WILKINSON

for women. We do advocate to improve services and accessibility and to have a service in the area that you live," she said.

OCEAN SEAFOOD

CHINESE RESTAURANT

