Global Health – Ireland and Arizona

**Galway, Ireland**

A 31-year old Indian dentist named Savita Halappanavar had been living in Galway, Ireland since 2008. When she was 17 weeks along in her pregnancy Savita sought emergency care for the severe pain associated with her miscarriage. Over the next three days, physicians in this Catholic country were unable to offer a simple procedure of manual vacuum aspiration to end the pain and bleeding associated with the miscarriage as a fetal heart persisted.

Savita developed nausea and vomiting and collapsed in a bathroom in the hospital. The next day, when no fetal heart was detected, a procedure to empty the uterus was performed. Within hours, Savita was transferred to intensive care with sepsis. Several days later Savita died of septicemia and organ failure.

Ireland’s constitution officially bans abortion, but a 1992 Supreme Court ruling stated abortion should be legalized for situations when the woman's life is at risk from continuing the pregnancy. Since that time, five governments have refused to pass a law resolving the confusion, leaving Irish hospitals reluctant to terminate pregnancies.

**Sierra Vista Regional Health Center, Arizona**

In early 2010, the secular Sierra Vista Regional Health Center in southeastern Arizona began a trial two-year affiliation with the Catholic Carondelet Health Network, a member of the Ascension Health system. As a condition of the affiliation, Sierra Vista, the sole community provider of acute care in a rural three-county region, was required to follow the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, commonly referred to as the Directives.

Later in 2010, a woman who had been 15-weeks pregnant with twins arrived at the Sierra Vista emergency department after miscarrying one of the twins at home. The remaining fetus had a heartbeat. The doctor who examined her recommended that the pregnancy be terminated, given the low chances of a successful pregnancy and the risks of attempting to continue the pregnancy, including severe hemorrhaging and infection. The physician recalled, “The patient and her husband were, of course, upset by the situation, but decided to proceed with the treatment.”

The physician and staff then began routine preparations to complete the miscarriage. A hospital administrator intervened and ordered the physician to transfer the patient to avoid violating the Directive against abortion. The patient was sent by ambulance to another hospital 80 miles away where she received the care she needed.
“It was a very gut-wrenching thing to put the staff through [and to] put the patient through, obviously,” recalled the attending physician. Another obstetrician felt misled by the hospital administration: “We were told that we wouldn’t have a problem with dealing with miscarriages ... and it turned out not to be true.”

Shortly after this incident, the board of Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center voted to discontinue its affiliation with Carondelet Health Network. The hospital subsequently joined a for-profit health system that has no religious affiliation and is therefore no longer constrained by the Directives.