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OPINION

Tell Crisis Pregnancy Center: Stop Lying to Women

By [Victoria Isquith](#)

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This fall at the Student Activities Fair, the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County had a booth alongside other organizations from town. The booth included shower flip-flops, business cards, pamphlets on parenting classes and healthy relationships and a game of “STD Jeopardy” positioned out front.

The booth was operated by the center’s director, Ms. Joanie Praamsma, who greeted students with a smile and offered her materials. When I introduced myself to Ms. Praamsma as the student who had previously written an article about her Crisis Pregnancy Center in *The Middlebury Campus* last fall, her smile disappeared. She considered my work an “attack” on her organization. She politely offered me her materials, and I took an example of each pamphlet before leaving the fair.

Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) often look like healthcare providers. When you drive by the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County on Route 7, you might mistake it for a legitimate women’s health resource. It has “free pregnancy testing” posted on large signs in front, and its website states its goal as “empowering women to make informed choices.”

The information that CPCs provide, however, is biased, ill-informed, and designed to intimidate women who may be considering abortion. Last fall, a student — Kelsie Hoppes 18.5 — visited the center to conduct research on how CPCs operate. (Kelsie wrote a blog post about her visit to the local CPC, titled “[I Went to a Fake Women’s Health Center, and Here’s What You Need to Know](#),” for the National Women’s Law Center.) When Kelsie suggested that a fictional friend might be considering an abortion, she was offered a pamphlet outlining the “risks” of the procedure. (You can see the pamphlet [here](#)). The pamphlet dramatically exaggerates the risks of abortion and suggests that abortion leads to increased risk of breast cancer and future infertility. Neither of these statements are supported by facts.

Moreover, the center claims to offer post-abortion counseling to those struggling from the “physical and emotional trauma of abortion.” The center includes a description of “Post Abortion Stress Syndrome,” a fictitious mental disorder that the Diagnostic Standards Manual — used by psychologists to define and diagnose mental disorders — does not recognize as legitimate.

In fact, a study from 2015 found that the majority of women who have abortions feel confident that their decision was the correct one, and do not struggle with emotional distress. While the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County’s website claims that it offers “evidence-based” information, it is clear that its information is ill-informed and biased, and that it intentionally associates abortion with medical risk and trauma.

Following the Student Activities Fair, a group of students mobilized to take action against

the local CPC. We met initially to establish our goals and to identify a tangible action that could be taken to protect our campus community from false information and threats to reproductive autonomy. The petition was proposed, with the stated goal of having the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County banned from advertising on campus or attending the Student Activities Fair. The language of the petition was then drafted, revised by students and staff, and shared online at [go/stoplyingtowomen](https://go.stoplyingtowomen.com). At present, the petition has more than 240 signatures from faculty, staff, and concerned students; I am in contact with campus organizations about endorsing the petition.

When I approached the Pregnancy Center's booth at the student activities fair, I made no effort to misrepresent myself. I introduced myself as the person who had written an article about the center previously and expressed some concern that the center was advertising on campus. The Pregnancy Resource Center, however, intentionally misrepresented itself to the student body. Ms. Praamsma informed me that she did not bring any of the center's pamphlets on abortion, despite its website clearly disseminating information about abortion. The local CPC intentionally withheld its biased information and marketed itself as a reproductive health resource for the Middlebury community.

CPCs threaten reproductive autonomy. Women should not be scared away from a safe and frequently practiced procedure, and students should not be implicated in the spread of biased and ill-informed information. Sign our petition at [go/stoplyingtowomen](https://go.stoplyingtowomen.com), and protect your peers' ability to make informed decisions about their own bodies.

Editor's note: Victoria Isquith helped organize a petition to bar the Pregnancy Center of Addison County from participation in Middlebury College events. See our front page for news coverage of the petition.


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