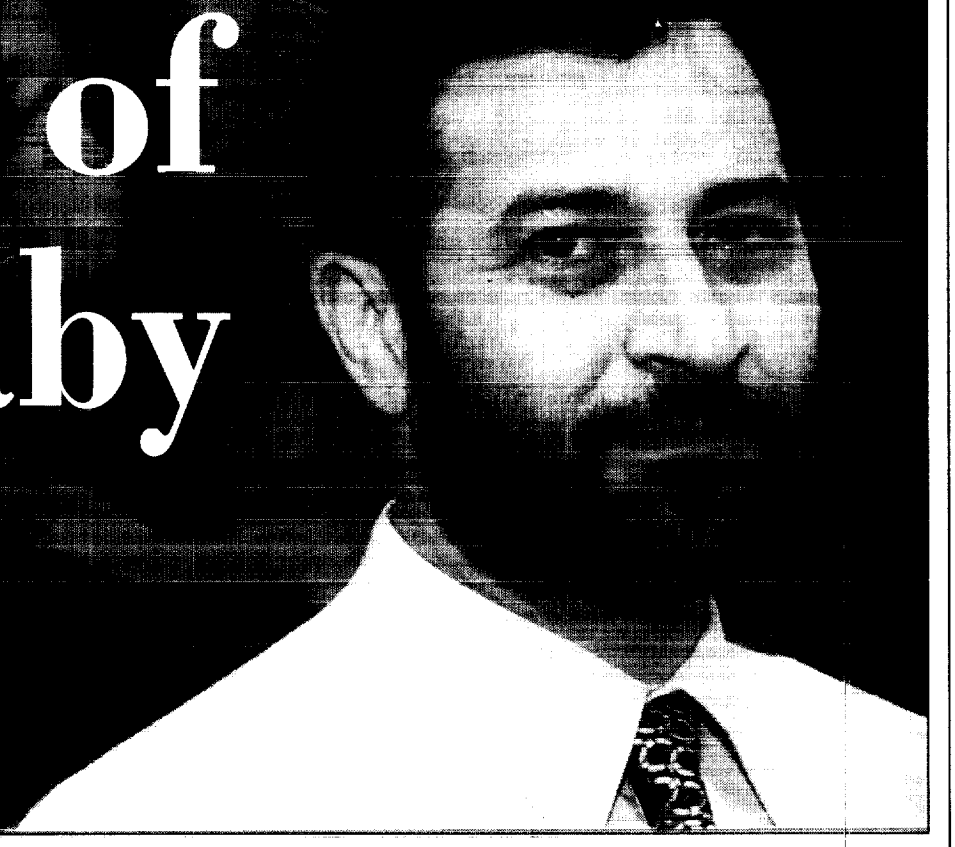
JIM HODSON

'After I do an abortion I go to sleep with the light on. In the dark I see a madman coming for me with his surgical knives'

Nightmares of the eight-baby case doctor



MEDICAL PIONEER: Professor Kypros Nicolaides saved the lives of twins with the first *in utero* laser surgery and is determined to support Mandy Allwood's attempts to have eight babies

By Caroline Phillips

HE IS the father of a little boy, the son of a convicted terrorist and the man trying to save Mandy Allwood's eight unborn babies.

He is a person who hates performing abortions so much that he wants to vomit every time he does one. He is also the doctor who helped a woman have a baby after 13 miscarriages.

Professor Kypros Nicolaides, head of foetal medicine at King's College Hospital, south London, says he is in a "no-win situation" with octuplet mother Mandy. But that will not deter him. He believes in a woman's right to choose, even if it endangers her life.

"I have counselled that there are a mass of possible health complications for mother and babies and a near certainty there will be no survivors," he says. "If I'm satisfied that a mother has understood that and she chooses to carry on with the pregnancy, who am I to say, 'You mustn't. You're wrong'?"

Mandy — dubbed "Mandy Awkward" by his colleagues — is sure it will be possible to deliver eight healthy babies. Contrary to reports, he has not said she should have a selective termination.

Kypros, 43, is a world leader in his field. He saved the lives of twins with the first *in utero* laser surgery and was the first doctor to drain excess fluid from the foetal heart with a catheter. He also pioneered early ultrasound scanning, foetal blood transfusions and the ultrasound diagnosis of abnormality. But he says he is driven by those outcomes which are tragic.

We're at his Dulwich home, a peaceful place with beautiful Greek paintings, icons and a bust of Hippocrates. He has squeezed me into an 8.30pm appointment. But he has forgotten he has a meeting at home with his team from the Foetal Medicine Foundation charity. So our interview starts at 10.30pm. While I wait, Kypros, who has a strong Greek Cypriot accent, offers take-away pizza, smokes with Olympic dedication and discusses preventing miscarriages with three research fellows. He has prodigious energy and inspires affection.

Kypros, who has a two-year-old son and 10 godchildren, hates terminations. "Every time I do one, I feel like vomiting," he says. After he performs an abortion — sometimes in the final three months if there is foetal abnormality — he goes home and sleeps with the lights on.

"In the dark I keep seeing images of myself coming towards me like some madman wielding surgical knives."

His octuplet patient is adamantly against foetal reduction. Kypros had seen Mandy only once when she named him in public as her obstetrician. Then she disappeared.

She contacted him two weeks ago for her second appointment only when she read in the press of his concerns for her health.

"I looked at the photo of her and thought: Either they've put a cushion under her blouse or this woman is about to explode."

Does he relish the challenge of treating this human guinea pig? "I stand only to lose. The challenge is a nightmare," he replies. "It could cost £1million and one week I may have to announce that she has miscarried, another week that she has died." Kypros believes the NHS should fund her care. "As a doctor, it's not my place to consider economic factors. No expense is too great when it comes to medicine."

He doesn't question Mandy's suitability for fertility treatment on principle — only on medical grounds. "Should we insist that those wanting fertility treatment first fulfil 10 criteria of perfect parenthood? Ninety-nine per cent of the population would fail."

When the octuplet story broke, Kypros spoke publicly of his association with Mandy. He admits that his intention was largely to divert the spotlight from Professor Phillip Bennett of Queen Charlotte's Hospital, west London, his beleaguered colleague who was the focus of international outcry after the Sunday Express revealed he was to abort a healthy twin. "Nobody was standing up for him. The proper debate was being obscured by people carrying placards and raising money."

The episode was an uncomfortable reminder for Kypros of how he was forsaken by the medical establishment when he was the subject of a police inquiry in 1990.

"I aborted one of twin foetuses for chromosomal abnormality at 27 weeks. A week after, the other twin was born naturally and survived."

At the time, the Life organisation had inspired political debate on foetuses being viable at 24 weeks. And MP David Alton was pressing for lowering the legal termination limit from 28 weeks. Kypros was reported to Life, who said the aborted twin must have been a feasible life. So was Kypros then a murderer? "There were questions asked in Parliament. It was a very distressing time," he says. A year later Sir Allan Green, the DPP, decided against prosecution. The inquiry concluded the abortion had been legal.

DID the furore make Kypros re-evaluate his behaviour? "I always question what I'm doing. Foetal medicine is a new field. Every technological advance has implications which require debate. That's how doctors form their ethical frameworks."

But six years later Kypros would support an abortion even on a baby with a cleft palate. "If a mother with a cleft palate chose to abort her baby for the same disability, who am I to argue?"

Kypros's grandparents were peasants and his father Herodotos was "a terrorist".

Herodotos was jailed for four years in Camp K in Nicosia for supporting the outlawed terrorist group EOKA (the Cyprus liberation movement). There he went on hunger strike, prepared to die for his ideals. Kypros was six when his father was released. His father was also a doctor, who did his mountain village rounds on a donkey.

Kypros went to an English school in Cyprus and at 17 was sent to England. A self-confessed workaholic, he drinks strong coffee past midnight and smokes his stubs when out of cigarettes. He expects his team to work 15-hour days six days a week and he hasn't had a holiday since 1978.

It's 1.30am. Words five inches high move across his computer screen: "Wake up Kypros or go to bed."