

# Our story of a woman's dilemma sparked reaction round the world



SOMEWHERE in London is a pregnant young woman — we called her Miss B — who is due to give birth to a healthy brother or sister for her existing toddler.

Miss B has no money and nobody to support her. Until a few weeks ago, she was expecting healthy twins, conceived naturally, without any fertility treatment or medical intervention.

But then, Miss B decided to have a selective termination of one of the twins she was carrying. She told her doctor that she simply "couldn't cope" with the prospect of two further children and asked him to get rid of one baby. He agreed.

Last Sunday, the Sunday Express broke this extraordinary story. Professor Phillip Bennett, one of the country's most eminent obstetricians, told our reporter Caroline Phillips that he was facing an enormous moral dilemma.

"Killing one healthy twin sounds unethical, but my colleagues and I concluded this week that it would be better to terminate one pregnancy as soon as possible and leave one alive than to lose two babies."

You do not need to know much more about this story to guess it would trigger a storm of reaction. Within hours of publication, the powerful Pro-Life lobby rallied to condemn the proposed operation.

By Monday, newspapers, radio and television news stations across the world were carrying the story. Offers of large sums of money, some reportedly exceeding £50,000, were being proffered by anti-abortion campaigners to save the life of Miss B's twin.

Leading authorities from the worlds of medicine, law and politics were paraded on our TV screens to discuss the enormously complicated moral and ethical issues. Some sneered at the appropriateness of such a story appearing in "the tabloid press", as though only Guardian readers had a right to know about these things.

PROFESSOR Bennett, who had talked freely and at length with the Sunday Express, however, was now silent. A short statement from Queen Charlotte's Hospital in Hammersmith, West London, merely confirmed that he had "no quarrel with the facts" in the Sunday Express report.

Then the ground shifted. If the professor had hoped to air a genuine modern medical dilemma — dubbed by some commentators as the most important to face us in years — his good intentions were dashed at a stroke.

On Tuesday afternoon, the High Court granted the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child an injunction preventing Professor Bennett from performing the operation on Miss B's twin and requiring him to inform her of the financial offers being made to her.

Hardly was the ink dry on the court documents when a peculiarly taciturn hospital suddenly announced that the abortion of one twin had already taken place.

The bombshell was devastating. When did it happen? Was Miss

every year faced with any new dilemmas resulting from research still unaired in the public arena?

Caroline Phillips, who had had a baby at Queen Charlotte's and was a member of its fund-raising committee, started to look into that matter. We soon established that Professor Phillip Bennett at Queen Charlotte's was the man to talk to.

An interview was arranged on Wednesday, July 31, during which the professor talked openly about many of the problems he faced and his profound belief that abortion was morally wrong, but freely admitted he was prepared to perform terminations under a wide variety of circumstances because he was driven by a sense of "global good" — that in many cases, you did "more good than harm by terminating unwanted pregnancies".

HE DESCRIBED a patient — Miss B — he had seen that day who presented the most enormous ethical and moral dilemma. He was careful not to identify her and, with this newspaper's agreement, changed enough details for her not to be recognised. He believed Miss B's case was to be the first selective termination of a normally-conceived healthy twin.

Details — painful to read — followed about how such terminations are performed. The professor talked thoughtfully and fluently about his views, while our tape-recorder ran.

The day after the interview Caroline Phillips faxed him a copy of the article. The professor asked for a few changes to be made, including two spellings.

At no stage did he ask us to change the article's context or tense, to suggest the operation had already been performed. We published the story.

Your letters flooded in, nearly all praising the report's honesty and clarity, whether you agreed with Professor Bennett's decision or not.

It seems a tragedy, then, that those issues so painstakingly spelled out by the professor should be lost in a senseless row over when the abortion was performed. Now, with news of a woman pregnant with eight babies, and herself facing selective terminations, our story is all the more poignant.

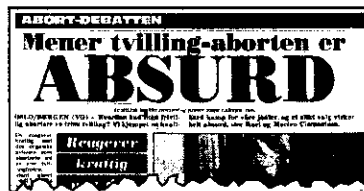
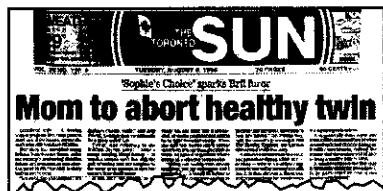
Miss B is not alone. In America maybe as many as 20 or 30 such selective terminations have been performed.

We talked last week to the women concerned and their doctors about the almost impossible dilemmas such cases throw up. Should a woman such as Carol, in our focus pages, be allowed to abort one twin because she didn't want two more children: she had a career to consider?

But what would be the consequences of insisting on her carrying an unwanted child? Phillip Bennett was brave enough to voice these questions in public.

The Sunday Express will tirelessly pursue the answers. It would be a tragedy if the furore over Miss B was to kill debate and close the curtains of secrecy around such fundamental matters of our time.

## Clouding a life and death issue



READ ALL ABOUT IT: Newspapers in Canada, Norway and New Zealand were among those following up the story

B's twin aborted in the days between the interview and the publication of our shattering report? Or was the operation still to be performed, but with the details disguised to help conceal the identity of a presumably anxious Miss B?

As no answers emerged from Queen Charlotte's, it was inevitable the messenger was next in line to be shot. Had the Sunday Express misled readers over the date of the abortion or deliberately sensationalised the story to sell more newspapers?

The answer is crystal clear. The Sunday Express, last weekend, had one of the most important medical stories in this country for years. Every detail was carefully checked. Every fact confirmed. We would never seek to deceive our readers

### Sunday Express OPINION

and never have. Professor Bennett worked closely with this paper on our story. He shares our view that important philosophical and ethical decisions are being made at the forefront of medicine without any public debate. That cannot be right.

Today, as a result of his candour, he is a virtual prisoner in his own home. He dare not speak to any journalist and has even faced the spectre (now dismissed) of a Government inquiry into his behaviour. Is this the way to treat a doc-

tor brave enough to discuss painful and controversial decisions about life itself? How did such an important debate become so hijacked? Let us start at the beginning.

A month ago, the editor of the Sunday Express suggested we look into new research, published in a number of medical journals, suggesting human foetuses could feel pain at an earlier stage than previously thought.

How might this new evidence affect the work of obstetricians and gynaecologists working on terminations? Did such knowledge make them reconsider what they were doing? Did any of them refuse to perform abortions in the light of such revelations? Were they worried? And, importantly, were those men and women who effected the 180,000 or so abortions in Britain