

IMMIGRATION

Nurse Accuses ICE Doctor Of Performing Hysterectomies At Suspiciously High Rates

Paging Dr. Mengele.

By LORELEI LAIRD

at 11:19 AM



A lot of the time, I use this column to highlight immigration news that is flying under the radar. I'm pleased (sort of) to say that this time around, I'm highlighting something that a lot of people outside of the world of immigration law have heard of: allegations that an ICE detention center in Georgia is removing detainees' uteruses at abnormally high rates.

As [the BBC reported Tuesday](#), this is one of multiple allegations in [a complaint](#) that immigrant and prisoner advocates filed with the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General and Office of Civil Rights on Monday. The complaint pertains to the Irwin County Detention Center, an ICE contract facility that is actually run by private prison company LaSalle Corrections. The complaint details what it calls "jarring medical neglect" of detainees, including shredding requests for medical care, fabricating medical

But the centerpiece is evidence of unnecessary hysterectomies. (Hysterectomy is removal of the uterus, and renders the patient unable to have children.) A nurse named Dawn Wooten, who left her job at the facility in July, says in the complaint that “just about everybody” seen by a gynecologist the facility uses gets a hysterectomy, even though “everybody’s uterus cannot be that bad.”

Indeed, there is evidence that these surgeries are being performed on the thinnest of excuses, and without the legally required informed consent. One detainee says in the complaint that she asked three different people why she was having the surgery, and got different answers from each. Julie Schweitert Collazo of Immigrant Families Together [said on Twitter](#) Tuesday that, according to an inmate at Irwin, every woman that inmate knows at Irwin has been diagnosed with ovarian cysts. (She also says the jailers at Irwin [took away inmates’ ability to make video calls](#) on the same day the complaint was filed. Hmmm.)

As it happens, ovarian cysts can affect your fertility, but not because the normal treatment is hysterectomy. [The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) says surgery to remove the cyst itself, or at most an ovary, is recommended for a cyst that’s very large or causing symptoms, or if they suspect cancer. A friend of mine who’s struggled with ovarian cysts says treatment for young women considers the risks of the treatment to future fertility. But as she observes, it’s a lot easier to take someone’s fertility away if you think they’re subhuman to begin with.

By now, it should be crystal clear that the Trump administration indeed does not believe that Latino people are human beings. It’s the only way someone could conceive of and implement family separation as a way to deter requests for asylum (which are both legal and protected by an international treaty). It’s the only way you can send people to their likely deaths in San Salvador, or in coronavirus-filled ICE jails.

But it’s also eugenics, and I suspect that’s why this is resonating beyond the outrage-fatigued world of immigration law. There is a long, ugly history of unnecessary sterilizations in this country, targeting [Black women](#) and other [women of color](#), and some of them were more recent than we’d prefer to think. The Nazis did that stuff too — one of the women in

eugenicists.

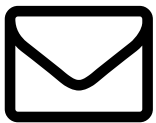
There are only two things I've ever known to change Trump administration immigration policy: lawsuits and sustained, family-separation-level outrage. Get to work.

Lorelei Laird is a freelance writer specializing in the law, and the only person you know who still has an "I Believe Anita Hill" bumper sticker. Find her at wordofthelaird.com.



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