



Senate Majority Leader Proposes Bill to Help Rape Survivors

Posted: 6:07 PM Mar 6, 2007

Reporter: Brock Bergey

Email Address: bbergey@nbc15.com

[Helping Rape Survivors 3-6-07](#)

Each year, more than 25,000 women become pregnant after being raped. 16,000 of those unplanned pregnancies end in abortion. But, there is an alternative, one supported by most rape survivors and at least one state lawmaker.

"It was my second or third night there. My friends on the trip dragged me to the hospital. I didn't even want to go. It never really occurred to me that this could result in pregnancy," says Amanda Harrington, a 21-year-old UW student.

She was attacked in Italy two years ago while studying abroad. At the hospital Amanda was offered emergency contraception, or EC as it's called, better known as the morning-after-pill.

It's a high concentration of birth control pills that prevents pregnancy when taken within 120-hours of unprotected sex.

"I was on contraception anyway, so I actually declined, but if I hadn't been offered any choice about what happened to me that night, it would be beyond devastating," says Amanda.

After returning home Amanda says she was shocked to learned EC is not always provided to sexual assault victims treated in Wisconsin hospitals.

"People tend to get away from the fact that it's sound, medical treatment," says Meg Robertson, a nurse practitioner with Planned Parenthood, who is also a rape survivor.

"It was very traumatizing for me that I had to worry every day for some time that I may become pregnant from it." says Robertson.

A 2006 study of 109 hospitals statewide found 33-percent of hospitals currently offer EC to rape victims. 42-percent don't provide it and 23-percent offer it with some exceptions.

"I think in the past people had a knee-jerk reaction to it and thought it was about abortion. This is not abortion. This is good health care and good medicine."

That's why Senate Majority Leader Judy Robson wants to require all hospitals in the state to provide rape victims with information about EC, and offer it to them upon request.

"If this requires a statutory mandate, and I can't believe it does. I will do everything in my power to make sure it's passed," says Amanda.

Robson hopes the new political make-up at the capitol will play in her favor. She's in the process of seeking co-sponsors.

Pro-life Wisconsin strongly opposes Robson's bill. The state director Peggy Hamill says, "So-called 'emergency contraception' will often act to cause a chemical abortion, and Pro-Life Wisconsin strongly opposes legislation that mandates Wisconsin hospitals to provide it."

Hamill goes on to say the organization sympathizes with victims of sexual assault, but says it is difficult to determine whether fertilization has occurred at the time EC is directed to be taken.

Governor Doyle has not indicated his stance on Robson's bill.