NEWS TIP:

DUKE PROFESSOR OFFERS MEDICAL, ETHICAL OPINIONS ON ABORTION PROTESTS

Harmon L. Smith, a medical ethicist who is a Duke University professor of religion and professor of community and family medicine, says the abortion protests that are currently underway in Buffalo, N.Y. are sad and tragic but not surprising. "Because what's at stake are two competing ideologies, neither of which are willing to brook change."

Smith observes that the protests are reminiscent of the civil rights movement in its early stages, "with the potential for the same kind of polarization and violence."

Smith says he doesn't think abortion has ever been a medical issue. "The medical issue is trivial. It's a philosophical and political issue that, like desegregation, probably can only be resolved in court." Smith says he doesn't believe physicians should be doing abortions at all. "As a medical practice it is open to question. I see it as a procedure that violates the Hippocratic Oath." He says the same sort of question was raised in Oklahoma, where doctors were asked to and refused to administer lethal injections to death row inmates. He believes health care workers, other than physicians, can be trained to perform the same procedures.

Reporters interested in talking to Smith about his views can reach him at (919) 660-3407.

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