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Doctor at South Georgia immigration detention center abused women, investigation finds

A U.S. Senate investigation into South Georgia's Irwin Detention Center found widespread medical abuse against women who were held in immigration detention there. Irwin was at the center of a 2021 federal whistleblower complaint after a nurse alerted advocates about suspected abuse. The investigation found female detainees were subjected to excessive, invasive, and often unnecessary gynecological procedures — including partial removal of the cervix and hysterectomies — often without consent. U.S. Senator for Georgia Jon Ossoff led the investigation. "Among the serious abuses this subcommittee has investigated during the last two years," Senator Ossoff said, "subjecting female detainees to nonconsensual and unnecessary gynecological surgeries is one of the most nightmarish and disgraceful." The investigation focused on Dr. Mahendra Amin, who was accused of performing these procedures. Karina Cisneros Preciado was detained at Irwin for 7 months. She was breastfeeding her four-month-old daughter and has no criminal record. Still she was put in detention because of her immigration status. She asked for a postpartum check-up, and was sent to Dr. Amin, who did not explain what he was doing. "I had suffered from sexual assault before as a child. So this kind of ...the experience with Dr. Amin made me feel the same thing," she said in front of the Senate subcommittee investigating the abuses. "I felt...it made me feel like I had no control over my body. I had no say. No vote, no nothing. Patients were referred to Dr. Amin by the private prison company that runs Irwin — LaSalle Corrections. The report shows he received referrals even though he's been dropped by an insurance provider for a number of malpractice lawsuits and was sued by the federal government for Medicare and Medicaid fraud. Dr. Amin has his medical license but does not have board certification from the national oversight group for gynecology. He could not be reached for comment at his medical office in Douglas, Georgia, where he currently sees OBGYN patients. But Scott Grubman, an attorney representing him, said in an email that his client only performed necessary procedures. But experts who testified in front of Congress said Dr. Amin's invasive exams and procedures were relics of care from forty years ago. Dr. Amin did not follow current medical guidelines. And expert review documented in the Senate report shows the doctor gave almost all his patients the same procedures regardless of diagnosis. Azadeh Shahshahani is the legal director for Project South, the advocacy organization that helped file the initial whistleblower complaint. Everything we were saying about the medical abuse of migrant women was confirmed as a result of this extensive 18-month Senate investigation," she said." At the hearing, representatives from the ICE Health Service Corps and LaSalle Corrections described a medical system that lacked accountability. Stewart Smith is the Assistant Director of the ICE Health Service Corps. He said there are now vetting standards and accountability procedures in place to prevent medical abuse. But Shahshahani says the pattern of abuse against women seeking medical care at detention facilities continues at Georgia's Stewart Detention Center. Stewart now accepts women in immigration detention after ICE ended its contract with Irwin. And Stewart is currently under investigation for sexual assault allegations against a male nurse. In the meantime, the Department of Homeland Security is still investigating Irwin, and there is an ongoing civil case against Dr. Amin.