

Fact Sheet on Valentina Milluzzo's Death

The following information was compiled from publicly available sources like media reports, statements from the family, and the preliminary official report. All are listed at the end.

Timeline:

- On 29 September 2016, Valentina Milluzzo, a healthy 32-year old woman was hospitalized at 17 weeks' gestation with a diagnosis of threatened abortion in a twin pregnancy. She was taken to the Ospitale Cannizzaro, the regional referral hospital in Sicily, Italy.
- She stayed there until her death 2½ weeks later. No medical records or details are available until the day before her death, when serious complications of sepsis were diagnosed.
- On 15 October, at 12.00 approximately, she presented with a high fever of 39°C with administration of antipyretics and immediate resumption of therapy IV with antibiotics.
- Valentina's father said: (Reporter's question: "Do you confirm that when you realized the fetuses could not be saved anyway, you asked explicitly for the operation [to terminate]?"") "Yes, I do. At 11:30 am, my wife and I, in front of relatives and friends, asked the doctor to not let our daughter suffer anymore. She was in agonizing pain, screaming in a terrible way since 9:00 am. They didn't give her anything to relieve her pain, and she had already collapsed three times. Her blood pressure was 70 and her body temperature was 34°C (93.2°F)."
- "After six or seven hours, and hearing Valentina always shouting, my wife asked to go and see my daughter. She went in and found her fainted with a 34-degree temperature. My wife screamed. She requested help, they gave oxygen to Valentina, my wife slapped her to wake her up a bit. My daughter said: 'Mom, I'm dying, I can't stand it any longer. Tell them to give me something to sleep, I can't do it, I want to sleep.' But a doctor told us, 'Be quiet, it is only the pains of childbirth.' And he did nothing."
- The family of Valentina Milluzzo said the doctor treating her refused to abort the foetuses because he was a "conscientious objector" to abortion.
- The lawyer alleges that the gynaecologist refused to abort the foetuses in order to save the mother and said: "As long as it's alive, I will not intervene."
- Valentina's partner, Francesco Castro, told reporters that his wife was "screaming in pain for nearly 12 hours" when he asked the doctor to intervene. Valentina had already given birth to one foetus, which was stillborn, but Castro said the doctor told him he could "not intervene" because he objected to abortion and the other foetus still had a viable heartbeat.
- After the death of one of the foetuses, Valentina reportedly became very ill and her blood pressure dropped rapidly. Her family asked for the other foetus to be aborted but say her doctor refused. Valentina died within hours on 16 October of septic shock.
- Valentina's father: "The doctor on duty that night in the birthing room said 'As long as that small heart is beating, even if it's only one of the two fetuses, I can do nothing, because I am a conscientious objector'."
- No action was taken while the troubled foetus was still alive, and hours later both had died, the lawyer said.

- At 23.20, in the delivery room, the patient expels the first stillbirth.
- At 24.00 an oxytocin infusion is started, consistent with the clinical need to induce the expulsion of the second foetus, which takes place at 1.40 on 16 October. The woman is moved to the operating room for surgical procedures afterbirth and curettage under anesthesia, which corresponds to 2:10.
- Blood loss was observed, so much so that a vaginal pack was applied and then (given the uterine atony) a tamponade in the uterine cavity.
- General conditions tend to decline; Valentina is intubated and assisted on a ventilatory plan. She is transferred to U.O. resuscitation where, at 13.45, despite the highest level of care and a temporary improvement of her general condition, death arrives.

A senior doctor at the hospital, Paolo Scollo, told the Corriere website that all the doctors in his department were "objectors". But the official report states: "There were no factors correlated to 'conscientious objection.' It was an abortive event spontaneously started, unstoppable, treated in emergency regime."

Comments from a medical perspective:

- The situation of threatened abortion is a frequent event, especially in twin pregnancies, but it can occur in any pregnancy. In medical terms this leads to the opening of the otherwise firmly closed entrance of the uterus, the cervix. The cervix not only keeps the pregnancy inside the uterus, but also protects it from infection, which may get into the uterus. An infection of a pregnant uterus is a potentially life-threatening situation for the foetus and the woman, because there is a high risk that it will spread to the whole body, causing sepsis.
- Sepsis is not only a very serious infection, but also frequently causes other life-threatening problems, like heavy bleeding due to coagulation disorders, renal failure, and/or very low blood pressure. Once sepsis and its consequences have occurred, there are only limited chances to save the patient's life. Consequently, every effort is usually undertaken to avoid sepsis by terminating the pregnancy early, before infection begins.
- Medically speaking, the situation of threatened abortion has two major risks: expulsion and subsequent death of the unviable foetus, and/or infection of the uterus with a very high risk of septicaemia and subsequent death of the woman. Early intervention (termination of the pregnancy) is needed to save the life of the woman.

Summary:

Valentina was apparently neglected by her treating doctors who did not induce an abortion in time to prevent the well known and serious risk of lethal infection in such a situation. When infection was diagnosed on the 15th of October (1 day before her death), apparently septicaemia and the subsequent serious consequences like a fall in blood pressure, coagulation disorder etc., had already occurred.

The observation that she had serious and unstoppable bleeding after curettage in the early hours of the 16th is another confirmation that at that point, she already had severe *disseminated intravascular coagulation* disorder (DIC) as a consequence of septicemia. In other words, the severe bleeding following the curretage is further proof that this

intervention was done far too late. Expulsion of the fetuses and curettage should have been done at least two days earlier, in which case, it is safe to assume Valentina would have survived without major complications.

The alarming conclusion is that Valentina was first severely neglected by her treating doctors for two weeks, when safe expulsion of the fetuses should have been done much earlier, and that while in the last hours the doctors did everything they could, it was already far too late.

Supporting Documents:

The following and subsequent documents can be found on the Conscientious-Objection.info website: <http://www.conscientious-objection.info/valentina-italy/>

[When a Fetal Heartbeat Is More Important, Sometimes Women Die](#)

Oct. 30, 2016, by Silvana Agathon and Lisa Canitano

[Valentina, who had no choice but to die from a miscarriage](#)

Oct 27, 2016, by Elisabetta Canitano

[Preliminary Report from the Board of Health, and Critiques](#)

Oct 24, 2016 (revised Nov 24)

Preliminary report of the Board of Health in Catania regarding the death of Valentina Miluzzo on Oct 16, in original Italian and translated to English. Following the report are three criticisms that were posted in response to the report, also in original Italian and translated to English. Then a critique of the report by Joyce Arthur, showing that the timeline in the report demonstrates medical negligence.

[Police launch inquiry into death of woman 'refused' an abortion by Sicilian doctors](#)

Oct 22, 2016, The Guardian

[Catania, Italy: Video of interview with Valentina's father:](#)

"My daughter screamed in pain, the doctor said he couldn't intervene."

Oct 20, 2016, Video Repubblica

[English translation of the interview](#)

[Italy abortion row as woman dies after hospital miscarriage](#)

Oct 20, 2016, BBC

Information compiled by Dr. Christian Fiala and Joyce Arthur, November 15, 2016