

Verdict Believed Near in Coast Trial of Feminist

Special to The New York Times

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 2—The trial of Carol Downer, a feminist accused of practicing medicine without a license, has ended its second week, with a verdict expected to be handed down Monday.

The 39-year-old defendant, a mother of six, is accused of illegally diagnosing and treating vaginal infection in another woman last May 11 at the Feminist Woman's Health Center in Los Angeles.

Mrs. Downer pleaded not

guilty to the misdemeanor charge and has made the trial a political issue.

"When we started the center, we asked several lawyers what we could legally do," said Mrs. Downer. "And they told us that the laws were so vague it would take a test case to find out."

"We knew what we were doing was controversial, and we expected an injunction," she said before a rule forbidding principals in the trial to talk to the press was issued by Municipal Judge Mary E. Wa-

ters. "But the indictments came as a surprise."

John Urso, a special investigator for the State Department of Consumer Affairs, disagrees that the law is ambiguous. "We are not objecting to the self-help concept or to women knowing their own bodies," he explained. "We do object to practicing medicine without a license, and if there is a diagnosis without a doctor present, it is against the law."

The defendant prescribed yogurt applied to the vagina

as treatment for the woman's vaginal infection. Mrs. Downer's defense has been that yogurt is an old family remedy and that a yeast infection is common among many well women and does not require a physician's diagnosis.

Colleague Charged

Charges were brought against Mrs. Downer and a colleague, Colleen Wilson, as a result of a six-month investigation by Mr. Urso. On Sept. 20 the police raided the center and confiscated equipment. The city attorney's office charged Mrs. Downer with one count of prac-

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Charged With Practice of Medicine Without License

ticing medicine without a license and Mrs. Wilson with 11.

Mrs. Wilson pleaded guilty to the charge of fitting a diaphragm, a birth control device, for another woman. She was fined \$250, given a 25-day suspended sentence and put on two years' probation. Mrs. Downer, if found guilty, could receive a six-month jail sentence.

The center was founded a year ago by Mrs. Downer and Lorraine Rothman, neither of whom has a medical background. It grew out of a series of self-help clinics aimed

at teaching women more about their bodies.

Vaginal self-examination is demonstrated in small classes to teach women to detect possible infection. The center main-

tains a 24-hour hot line and provides a pregnancy screening service. It receives its income through an abortion referral service.

"We do not diagnose preg-

nancy but report possible positive signs," explained Mrs. Rothman, who said that women with serious health problems were referred to certified gynecologists for treatment.

FEMINIST WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTER

SELF-HELP CLINIC ONE

WOMEN'S ABORTION REFERRAL

WOMEN'S FREE CLINIC

POINT OF INFORMATION:

Carol Downer, co-director of the Feminist Women's Health Center, who was acquitted Tuesday of the charge of "practicing medicine without a license," is available for interviews.

For more information, contact the Feminist Women's Health Center at 746 Crenshaw in Los Angeles. Phone: 936-7219 or Joan Hoffman, press secretary at 465-1186 or 936-7219.

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Part II—Wed., Dec. 6, 1972

Jury Acquits Feminist in Yogurt Case

BY DOUG SHUIT
Times Staff Writer

An eight-man, four-woman Municipal Court jury Tuesday acquitted feminist Carol Downer, operator of a women's self-help clinic, of a charge that she practiced medicine without a license.

The charge, which has become a cause celebre among feminist groups, stemmed from Mrs. Downer's use of yogurt as a home remedy for a woman's vaginal yeast infection.

Mrs. Downer, 39, founder of the Feminist Women's Health Center, 746 Crenshaw Blvd., based her defense during the five-day trial on a woman's right to examine her own body.

Defense Contention

Attorneys for Mrs. Downer, Diane Wayne and Jeanette Christy, argued during the trial that application of the home remedy was no different than applying eye drops to an eye infection or a Band-Aid to a bruised knee.

Mrs. Downer was arrested and charged with the misdemeanor offense after an investigation by the California Department of Consumer Affairs and the state Board of Medical Examiners, who sent two women undercover agents to observe classes conducted by the defendant at the clinic.

At the class May 11, one of the agents saw Mrs. Downer examine a young woman, discuss the infection, and then apply the yogurt, according to testimony.

Dep. City Atty. David Margolies argued that Mrs. Downer's actions constituted both diagnosis and treatment, as well as the practice of medicine.

Wide Attention

According to medical testimony, yogurt is used as a curative because bacterial agents in the dairy product work to combat bacterial agents spawned by the yeast infection, described as a common feminine problem.

The trial received nationwide attention. Mrs. Downer was supported by Rep. Bella Abzug, feminist writer Gloria Steinem, editor Robin Morgan, and Dr. Benjamin Spock.

After leaving Municipal Judge Mary Water's courtroom Tuesday, Mrs. Downer said of the verdict:

"It's going to be a great boost. We've been completely in doubt about where the line should be drawn in our self-examinations. I think now we know where the line can be drawn."