

Anti-Circumcision Group Supports Medical Report

This story appeared in the "Living" section of The Burlington Free Press June 7, 1999

The seven pound boy is just 1 day old as Dr. Harry Romanowitz lays him on a blue, plastic board and fastens tiny Velcro straps around his dimpled, kicking legs. The curly-haired infant wiggles and whimpers, while the physician-honoring the wishes of the newborn's parents-snips the taut end of the infant's genital foreskin, which has been smeared with an anesthetic cream. Romanowitz has done hundreds of circumcisions, as a pediatrician and as a mohel, one who performs the rite on an eight day old Jewish boys. Romanowitz admits the cream will NOT completely protect his tiny patient from pain of the surgical scissors." Oh, yes it will hurt", he says, " he is going to really cry and it won't sound the same as if he is tired or hungry."

{ Notice how the short time, two minutes, is stated to compensate for what was very agonizing. How do we know what time is for an infant? A minute may seem a day. Why do circumcisers always need to feel O.K. about what they've done and what they're doing?}

As Romanowitz pushes the foreskin back and attaches a clamp to cut the foreskin away, the baby's whimpers become shrill screams. Less than two minutes after Romanowitz has begun the cutting, the baby is bandaged and returned to his mother, sleeping.

{ Less than two minutes later he is done? A circumcision involves more than just the cutting of the foreskin. Most will take at least ten minutes. Further, why do authors use time to perhaps make us think it is short and soon over, so why worry? Isn't this the hidden, subtle message they're trying to convey?}

"You can't keep track of the medical benefits- it goes back and forth," Chasen says. " This is a practice we (Jews) trace back to Abraham. For 4,000 years our people have been circumcising male children."

While radio shock jock Howard Stern has taken to ranting publicly about his circumcision, blaming his parents for diminishing his sexual sensitivity-- a view echoed by the anti-circumcision movement-- one of the most passionate arguments anti-circumcision arguments is parents have no right to make this kind of profound choice for their infant sons.

" Thank God, some of us are finally beginning to realize its barbaric," says Marilyn Milos, a registered nurse, who 20 years ago founded NOCIRC.

Milos notes that she began NOCIRC- which has affiliate chapters in most states and several countries- after witnessing a circumcision while training to be a midwife. The mother of four, whose sons had been circumcised prior to that incident says, " when you see the baby shrieking and pushing himself against his restraints, you can't come away thinking its anything but mutilation."

"We rationalize (and trivialize) this because we want our children to be like us," she adds, "but we've been damaged and we don't want to deal with it because we deny our pain." Davis says the most frequently given reason he hears for parents wanting to circumcise their son is that the boy's father is circumcised. For the Jewish circumcision is, " one of our most cherished Commandments ", Chasen says.

Romanowitz says he tells parents circumcision could reduce the chance of their sons' developing a urinary tract infection in the first year .

{ Isn't this so typical of a mohel, trying to scare parents into compliance. Didn't the AAP just say there was nothing lost to the child's well being by leaving him alone (intact)? }



This infection can be more problematic for infants because it can go undetected and cause serious kidney infections, which can become systemic or trigger meningitis.

{ This reminds me of Fink, Wiswell and Roberts. When they think the pro-circ case not strong enough go to scare tactics and improbable scenarios. I think these men have to come to grips with why they want to circumcise other people's children. The urge to circumcise can be a compulsion for some people, obviously the Free Press found one in Romanowitz }

Like a growing number of physicians, Romanowitz makes no claims that the procedure he has just performed is medically necessary. In fact, in March the American Academy of Pediatrics changed its position and announced it will not longer recommend (it never did) it as a routine medical practice. Some anti-circumcision groups say they will lobby the ACOG, The American College Of Obstetricians to formally say the same. It is frequently the obgyn's who circumcise the babies they deliver.

Dr. Ira Berstein, a Burlington Obstetrician says he has no strong feeling either way. Romanowitz says he thinks the A.A.P. decision will spark parents to debate the issue one way or the other. Circumcision is a procedure the World has favored or disfavored over time, says Rabbi Joshua Chasen of Burlington's Ohavi Zedhi Synagogue.

(Not so, Jews have always circumcised as have Moslems, only in the last sixty years have Americans favored

Another frequently cited health benefit: There are virtually no cases of circumcised men who have cancer of the penis. The rate is one in 600 for uncircumcised men.

{ The figure is closer to 1.5 per 100,000. The one in 600 was a theoretical pro-circumcision calculation cited by T.E. Wiswell. Most disagree that it is that common. However this figure means 99.99 percent of not circumcised men will never have cancer of the penis. The word cancer brings fear to many so its deployed indiscriminately by pro-circumcisionists }

Still the American cancer Society refuses to recommend circumcision as a preventive measure. And when asked, about the nominal health risks, Milos says, " We don't cut off other body parts at birth, like my breasts or ovaries, because we might get cancer someday.

{ I wish I could be as polite as Marilyn, but I know the pro-circ cabal for what it is. Funny the reporter did not call

circumcisions. Most of the World has never circumcised and does not now. The Rabbi has his facts wrong, unless he is speaking strictly from a Jewish historical perspective)

Romanowitz says states such as California where anti-circumcision movement is twenty years old, and where legislation to ban the procedure has been introduced, is more of an issue., " but in the northeast I think it will be a while before it really takes hold. In any case the announcement of the pediatricians' umbrella group is seen as a boost to the small, but growing anti-circumcision movement that describes the procedure as " genital mutilation."

Some members of the movement liken the cutting of the foreskin with practice of removing the clitoris of young girls to encourage sexual purity. Anti-circumcision groups say they hope to use the AAP's new stance as an opportunity to encourage parents to refuse the procedure, which is typically done performed a few days after birth on 65 percent of American baby boys--the highest rate in any industrialized country.

Gary E. Davis, director of the Vermont Regional Center of the California based National Organization of Circumcision In formation resource Centers, feel that pro-circumcision is a bias among the medical profession. Circumcision is much less frequent in Latin America and Europe. It has decline dramatically in New Zealand and Australia. And although religious beliefs dictate that it remain a custom in many Jewish and Muslim families, even within those cultures there is fringe movements that question its merits.

Next Coulomb Please....

Romanowitz a pro-circumcisionist isn't it, they labeled us anti-circumcisionists.)

This story appeared in the Burlington Free Press, Burlington, Vermont, page C1, on June7, 1999. My critique appears below.

Critique

In Japan where men are not circumcised the penile cancer

rate is 0.3 per 100,000, hardly a common cancer. In fact such international differences shed much doubt that circumcision has much to do with the prevention of penile cancer at all.

Why didn't the story contain a contact web address for NOCIRC?

Why are we called anti-circumcisionists, while Romanowitz is just a mohel. In any event, at least we can gauge where the man is coming from. What I do-not understand is why he encourages non-Jewish parents with scary and very speculative pro-circ statements.

Marilyn Milos was quoted in such a way that many would not understand what she means.

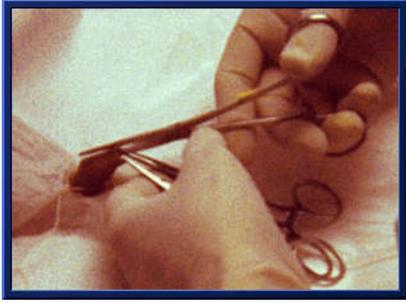
Sorry Marilyn, but unless I knew your position I wouldn't know from the quotes what you met. And is the crux of the anti-circumcision movement simply infant stress, golly some say they can fix that with lidocaine, creams etc..

It would have been more interesting to see what local folks are doing since March first. Is the 80 percent circ rate at Fletcher Allan declining at all?

Indeed, what excuses are people using these days to have their son snipped?

Over all I felt the story needed much more perspective and depth. It stated some medical issues, such as kidney disease prevention and cancer that are NOT documented well in the literature. Its mostly speculation by pro-circs.

Finally, if we are anti-circumcisionists, what is Romanowitz? Just a doctor doing his job, honoring parental requests for non-indicated surgery?



The foreskin is crushed with a hemostat.

What is the objective of this surgery?
Why so much denial and rationalizing on the part of doctors. Can they not admit they were wrong?

Last Update: 06/21/1999