
▪ **NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN** ▪

INFORMANT

INFORMING MICHIGAN ON THE HARM OF CIRCUMCISION

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Routine Circumcision Is On Its Way Out In Michigan !

10 Good Reasons Why Boys Will Stay Intact

NOCOM is committed to protecting baby boys born here in Michigan from the harm of circumcision. We believe routine circumcision will collapse under its own weight. History is on our side for the following 10 reasons:

1. There is a growing body of facts *against* circumcision from national and international medical organizations and reputable journals.
2. Well organized, parent education efforts are underway nationally against routine infant circumcision. More information will be freely available to expectant parents.
3. A greater number of intact boys are coming of age. They are able to speak out in favor of an intact body and protect their sons from harm.
4. There is a growing recognition that the origins and bias in favor of male circumcision are similar to

those promoting female genital mutilation. Rather than regarded as simply a hospital procedure or a religious rite, the physical act of male circumcision will be associated with disgust.

5. We are returning to natural child-birth and patient-centered care for the delivery of babies. The informed *consumer* will have the final say and will say "NO!"
6. Most doctors will be unwilling to promote circumcision when faced with the possibility of future backlash or lawsuits from angry parents.
7. There is less shame about sexuality now and therefore a greater acceptance of the natural state of a baby's body.
8. A growing number of health care providers are joining the informed ranks *against* circumcision.

9. The recognition of children's rights as a legitimate social and legal concern. *Body-ownership rights* will be acknowledged and litigated in the courts.

10. And finally, YOU, the well-informed **Informant**, able to speak knowledgeably and openly against infant circumcision with expectant parents and nosey grandparents!

Together, we are helping Michigan parents make the *right* choice for their babies. History will praise and thank you!

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to NOCIRC of Michigan's **INFORMANT**

This is the first newsletter of **NOCIRC of Michigan**. We hope to use it as a bridge-builder to our supporters and members in Michigan. It represents our commitment to you, the **NOCIRC Informant**, to provide quarterly information on **NOCIRC** activism in this state and to activists everywhere. Please feel free to write us with your comments, contributions, and questions:

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Norm Cohen, Director

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The Second Time Around

by Anita Sherman Reynolds

Just hours after our first child was born, he underwent one of the most traumatic events of his life: He was circumcised. My husband and I signed the consent form with virtually no idea of what takes place during a circumcision. It was just “what you do” to baby boys. My doctor told us nothing.

When I was pregnant with my third child (my second child was a girl), I found out that I was carrying another son. I asked my midwife for her opinion on circumcision. She said she thought it was “awful”. Her reply surprised me. Her frank statement and the discussion that followed convinced me that we should *not* circumcise our next boy.

Most caregivers are unwilling to take a stand against circumcision because they still believe in its supposed benefits (which have never been proven) or because they fear influencing or offending parents. Fortunately my midwife was both knowledgeable and honest.

Our third child was unexpectedly born with a heart defect and died after a month in intensive care. The part of our birth plan refusing circumcision became irrelevant.

Six months later I was pregnant, again with a boy. After seeing our previous child undergo numerous painful procedures in an attempt to save his life, I could not imagine subjecting a child to the pain of an unnecessary surgery. My new midwife also believed in leaving the foreskin alone. Our fourth child was born at home and left whole and intact.

I feel strongly now that the decision to circumcise shouldn't be a doctor's or a parent's decision to make. It is the *child's* body and should be the *child's* decision.

In the process of becoming a certified childbirth educator and childbirth assistant, I continued to learn about circum-

cision. A videotaped circumcision left me shaken and full of regret and sadness over having allowed it to be done to my own son. It was disturbing to watch this bizarre and harmful ritual inflicted on a screaming, helpless newborn. It brought up anger towards my previous doctor who concealed the brutality of the procedure and its short and long-term physical and psychological effects.

I now strongly advise parents against circumcision and explain to them the sexual and protective functions of the foreskin. People need to know that circumcision is not a minor or benign surgery.

Some mothers and fathers express concern about how to handle differences in intactness both inside and outside of the family. Our oldest child did notice shortly after the birth of our fourth child that his little brother's penis was “bigger” than his. I explained that it wasn't bigger but that his baby brother had more skin on his penis because he wasn't circumcised. I told him he'd been circumcised when he was a baby because we thought it was the right thing to do. I told him that we knew better now and that it was unnecessary and painful.

My son was satisfied with my explanation and now only occasionally asks a question on the subject. Although he's very comfortable with his body, he has already decided he will not circumcise any son of his.

I'm glad to know that in our family this practice will stop with him. I have sometimes found it difficult to talk openly with him on the subject because I feel responsible and guilty. But it is by admitting our mistakes and making changes that we learn and grow. It's probably easier to explain to an intact child why he is intact than it is to explain to a circumcised child why he is circumcised.

My youngest son is only three so I haven't had that conversation with him

yet. I hear from other parents of intact sons that their boys are grateful for their intactness. They don't understand why anyone would want to do such a strange thing as cutting off skin from their penis.

Regardless of the intactness of the child, a simple explanation is all that is needed. Your child will appreciate your openness. As the circumcision rate continues to drop and the male population becomes evenly divided between the circumcised and uncircumcised, *all* parents must be able to offer an explanation.

I know that expectant mothers are sometimes subjected to peer pressure urging circumcision. They may fear that their child will be different. Fathers often have difficulty with conflicting emotions surrounding their own circumcisions. They feel “if it was done to me it should be done to him”.

We show great strength when we face these concerns and decide to put our children first and respect their basic human right to an intact body. As responsible citizens and caring individuals, we are called on now to break this cycle of wounding our male children.

Fathers, show courage and don't circumcise your son because you are circumcised or because a previous son was circumcised. Mothers, don't relinquish your child from your protective arms to undergo this mutilation. Parents, show your love by protecting his sacred body.

Imagine yourself as that new baby whose *every* experience is becoming part of him and how he sees the world. He asks only to be nurtured and kept from harm. This cannot feel like a safe place to live when one of his first experiences is the feel of scissors and scalpel between his legs. Don't violate his trust in you from the very start. Welcome your son *peacefully* into the world.

Anita Sherman Reynolds is the Director of NOCIRC of Ann Arbor. She is a certified childbirth educator and certified childbirth assistant.

NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN

NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN is a consumer rights advocacy group helping parents understand that circumcision is harmful to their children.

We educate mothers, fathers and health care providers in Michigan about the harm of circumcision and about proper intact care. We protect consumers from false medical claims. We actively promote the benefits of normal genitalia.

We are a non-profit group consisting of health care professionals and dedicated lay people. We are committed to effective education, advocacy, and activism to protect babies from harm. We are part of a worldwide organization dedicated to ending all forms of male and female genital mutilation.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

What We Did in 1995, We'll Do More of in 1996

1. An ad offering parents free information ran monthly in Detroit's *Metro Parent Magazine* and appeared in *Metro Baby*.
2. Many brochures and article reprints were mailed in response to parent inquiries.
3. 225 local health care professionals were surveyed for their views on circumcision. The response rate was 23%.
4. 50 boxes of brochures were to sent to supportive health care providers for distribution to their patients.
5. Information tables were staffed at three local exhibitions.
6. A public lecture and a radio interview were held.
7. Flyers were posted on local bulletin boards offering free information.
8. **NOCIRC of Michigan** was formally organized, as a non-profit corporation operating in Michigan.

Exhibit Dates Set for 1996

Volunteers are needed to help staff information tables at the exhibitions listed below. We generated a lot of interest in 1995 at local exhibitions.

Come and enjoy sharing with others! Please call (810) 642-5703 to volunteer.

◆ **March 16th:** *Inner Life Health and Self Enhancement Expo*, Dearborn, MI

◆ **April 19th - 21st:** *Midwifery Today Conference*, Ann Arbor, MI

◆ **April 20th:** *Liberty Fair, Libertarian Party of Michigan Convention*, Roseville, MI

◆ **September:** *Birmingham/Bloomfield's Parent and Baby Show*, Bloomfield Hills, MI

◆ **September:** *Earthfest '96*, Sterling Heights, MI

◆ **October:** *Birth and Parenting Expo*, Ann Arbor, MI

Wilkie Murray and Norm Cohen educate the public on the harm of circumcision at Earthfest '95, held last year in Sterling Heights, Michigan.

NOHARMM Video Released

The landmark NOHARMM documentary, "*Whose Body, Whose Rights?*", premiered in January in San Francisco. This one-hour video was produced by Tim Hammond of the National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males. It contains interviews with Dr. Dean Edell, Ashley Montagu, and attorney Charles Bonner. Norm Cohen, of NOCIRC of Michigan, also appears.

This documentary explores the shocking U.S. history of medicalized sexual mutilations of both males and females. Men from diverse walks of life give moving personal testimony about the lifelong adverse consequences of circumcision.

Many ethical and legal questions surrounding this bizarre American medical phenomenon are explored. The program reveals a growing movement of circumcised men seeking foreskin restoration, as well as the growth of "alternative bris" ceremonies among Jewish families.

A public viewing of this important video is coming this summer to Detroit.

A Tribute to Edward Wallerstein

The Grand-Daddy of Genital Sanity

by George Shenkar

Edward Wallerstein was not a physician. He was an industrial engineer, an inventor and a researcher, but most of all he was an honest man, an avid seeker of the truth. In the 1940's his wife, Florence gave birth to a son. Trusting the "expertise and authority" of their physician, who was also their friend, they agreed to have their infant son circumcised, accepting the various reasons presented for this "beneficial surgery".

It was not until twenty years later that a serious doubt arose. He was informed by a young couple that, in talking to three obstetricians, one was pro-circumcision, one was against, and one said it made no difference—that it was just a matter of choice. Now, how could this be, if it was "necessary" and "beneficial"?

True to his natural curiosity, Ed decided to research the subject. To his great amazement, he could find no current book on the subject, neither in the public or the medical libraries. The one book in the entire New York Public Library system was an 1891 volume which claimed that circumcision prevented or cured about 100 ailments, including alcoholism, epilepsy, hernia and lunacy!

Now this got Ed really interested. For the next 12 years he spared no effort to get at the real facts. He was appalled by the misinformation and ignorance that

prevailed, not just among the general population, but within the medical community as well. He thoroughly researched all available articles in medical journals as far back as the early 19th century. He talked to physicians and pediatricians. The result of this thorough research was his award-winning book, "**Circumcision An American Health Fallacy**". Published in 1980, it was the most comprehensive and thorough work to deal with this subject.

Even though the circulation of Edward Wallerstein's book was limited, it gave substance and purpose to many others who also had their doubts. Marilyn Milos, a nurse, had been surprised and shocked by the terrible screams of pain of a baby being circumcised. She was fired from her job for discussing this with parents. Her experiences, combined with the work and studies of Edward Wallerstein, led her to found NOCIRC, the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers, in San Anselmo, California.

Edward Wallerstein died in 1992, but his legacy lives on as the rate of circumcision in the United States continues to decrease, year by year. In tribute, we remember his book's concluding words:

"Today, circumcision is a solution in search of a problem. The operation has no place in a rational society . . . routine infant circumcision is archaic,

useless, potentially dangerous, and therefore should cease."

However, just as the truth about circumcision was concealed for decades, so was the circulation of Ed's book strictly limited by a biased medical establishment, which profited enormously from this useless and harmful procedure.

In Britain, when the National Health Care funding for circumcision was withdrawn in 1947, the circumcision rate fell from 50% to less than 1%.

I was still unable to find any books in the Detroit Public Library system in the 1990's, when I started to research the matter. Fortunately, I discovered Ed Wallerstein's name as the author of the article on circumcision in the Encyclopedia Americana. I contacted Ed and received a few copies of his monumental work, one of which I contributed to the Detroit Public Library.

George Shenkar, of Detroit, corresponded with Wallerstein and his son. He has been involved with NOCIRC since 1991.

BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Real Quotes from Real Doctors

"A remedy (for masturbation) which is almost always successful in small boys is *circumcision*. The operation should be performed by a surgeon without administering an anesthetic, as the pain attending the operation will have a beneficial effect upon the mind."

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg
Battle Creek, Michigan
in his book, *Plain Facts for Old and Young*, 1888

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

Become An Informant

A tax-deductible membership fee of \$25 or more makes you a NOCIRC of Michigan *Informant*. Help us to educate parents!
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