
▪ **NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN** ▪

I N F O R M A N T

INFORMING MICHIGAN ON THE HARM OF CIRCUMCISION

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2, JUNE, 1996

Men Are Finding Their Circumcision Scars

Most Angry, Some Sad, and Some Just Don't Want to Know

We all have scars. For each one, we can recite a story. But there is one scar for which most men have had no story. Until now.

As an average boy born in America, when you were but a day or two or eight days old, your little limbs were suddenly strapped to a fiberglass board or held tight by the ones who loved you. You struggled and cried, not knowing what was about to take place.

Your cries were justified. First, a tool was used to tear free your foreskin. Perhaps by the nice doctor that had just delivered you. At the time, your foreskin shared a common layer with the head of your penis, like a fingernail on your finger. You screamed, gasped and panted. The circumciser kept working, hearing nothing.

A clamp or a fixture crushed your ripped foreskin. A sharp knife was presented. Then there was the cutting, all around. The circumciser never bothered to measure first. Precautions were taken so he didn't cut right into the rest of your tiny penis. In your case, these worked. Off came your foreskin like a bloody glove. He threw it in the garbage can with the rest of 'em.

You were in shock, you cried, you couldn't suckle. They took measures to stop your bleeding and prevent infection. In your case, these worked. Your doctor or mohel received good money. After all, your parents had asked him to do it. They were told it was for the best. Sadly, they were wrong. You have the scars and loss of function to prove it.

Whether or not you remember it, this happened. Your circ scars are unmistakable. There is no reason to believe it was

any better or was less painful for you than for the little boy before you or for the one they did this morning.

If you are a circumcised man, this is the story of your scar. We hope it hurts, because it should.

In 1994, The National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males (NOHARMM) published a landmark study of circumcision harm. *AWAKENINGS: A Preliminary Poll of Circumcised Men* was the first to reveal the adverse physical, sexual and psychological effects on men of a surgery they did not choose.

Now, more circumcised men than ever are finding their circumcision scars. They are choosing to leave their own baby boys intact. They have decided that the knife, and the scars, will stop with them.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Help Wanted: *Informants*

Job Requirements: Tell the truth to parents about the harm of infant circumcision.

Job Description: Inform the ones you serve, the ones you love, and the ones too ignorant to ask. Clear up 100 years of misinformation, rationalization, fear and shame. Re-educate parents and doctors about keeping their hands off children's foreskins.

Prerequisites: A love of children and experience in speaking up for what you believe.

Salary: none **Job Satisfaction:** Fantastic!

Apply Within—Yourself.

On behalf of all the children, thanks!

Norm Cohen, Director

CONTENTS

Men Find Their Circ Scars	1
Director's Message	1
The Internet Ends Ignorance	2
Mission Statement	3
National News	3
Local News	3
Speaking with Parents	4
Bad Ideas from Medicine	4

The Internet Ends A Century of Circumcision Ignorance

by Patrick Draper

The Internet is the world's newest method of communication. It has grown remarkably in both size and importance in recent years. Millions around the world communicate regularly through any one of thousands of Internet access providers, such as America Online and CompuServe.

The Internet now relays a significant part of our "global conversation" about issues that concern all of us as human beings. Genital mutilation is a particularly important topic of discussion that has entered our global conversation. A wealth of information about genital mutilation, particularly male circumcision, is available on the Internet.

The most comprehensive source of circumcision information on the Internet is the *Circumcision Information and Resource Pages* (at <http://www.cirp.org/CIRP/>).

This excellent Web site is maintained by Geoffrey Falk. Geoffrey is a Ph.D. student at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York, and is a visiting graduate student at the Fields Institute in Toronto, Ontario.

Foremost among the many articles in the *Circumcision Information and Resource Pages* is a "FAQ" (a list of "Frequently Asked Questions"). The FAQ is a brief overview of the most common issues and questions that parents have about circumcision. It presents well thought out answers to those questions, with citations from the medical literature to support them.

By its nature, an FAQ is uncontroversial since it is a summary of the discussion on the Internet for the purpose of bringing new participants up to speed quickly with the current state of the discussion. The questions listed in the FAQ have been well discussed and the answers are generally agreed upon by all parties in

the debate to represent the most accurate and concise information available today.

Of course, since the pursuit of knowledge is a never ending journey, the FAQ is frequently updated with new questions and the old answers are revised as new knowledge is gained. Geoffrey's FAQ list is unusual because it contains references to articles that are located in another area of his archive, the *Circumcision Reference Library*.

The *Circumcision Reference Library* is a collection of articles from activist, medical and legal sources which represent the cutting edge of academic thought on circumcision. Many of these articles were written from research in progress. The articles in the reference library offer valuable insight into the current global conversation about circumcision.

A great deal of the current research involves the physical anatomy of the foreskin and the purpose of the structures of the penis that are removed during circumcision.

An illustrated guide to the anatomy and mechanics of the intact penis is presented for the purpose of showing how a natural foreskin behaves. In a country that has relatively few intact penises, many are unfamiliar with the appearance, mechanics, and the sexual benefit that an intact penis affords. The graphics in this guide clearly show the complex dynamics that men in Europe, Asia, and South America experience as a natural part of their lives.

Parents who confront the circumcision decision will find the information provided to be invaluable. Some will approach the issue from a religious standpoint, and there are several articles that address the religious issues from a number of different angles. Others might view circumcision as an American tradition, so there are several articles explaining the origins of secular circumcision as a Victorian "cure" for masturbation.

By far, the greatest number of parents will be concerned that there might be a medical benefit to circumcision. All of the old myths about the medical benefits of circumcision have been disproved in research spanning fifty years, and most of the articles explain those results in various ways.

A hopeful aspect of Geoffrey's Web site is the information relating to non-surgical foreskin restoration. A growing number of men are reclaiming their right to an intact body by stretching the remaining skin on their penis to form a functional facsimile of a natural foreskin. This process is time consuming, but it results in a restoration of the natural foreskin function, increased sexual sensitivity, and enhanced self-esteem that comes from a natural, intact appearance.

Every parent who visits the *Circumcision Information and Resource Pages* will find their greatest value to be the fact that for each of their questions, there is a reasonable and humane answer to the painful and obsolete practice of infant circumcision.

Patrick Draper, of Ionia, Michigan, first learned about the harm of circumcision while listening to Dr. Dean Edell's radio talk show.

The Informant is the quarterly newsletter of **NOCIRC of Michigan**. It is a bridge builder to our supporters and members in Michigan. It represents our commitment to **NOCIRC** supporters to provide quarterly information on **NOCIRC** activism in this state and to activists everywhere. Articles, comments and questions are always welcome.

NOCIRC of Michigan

P.O. Box 333, Birmingham, MI 48012
 Phone: (810) 642-5703
 Fax: (810) 642-9528
 E-mail: 72202.307@compuserve.com
 Norm Cohen, Director

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 children from harm. We are part of a worldwide organization dedicated to ending all forms of male and female genital mutilation.

NATIONAL NEWS

The Fourth Int'l Symposium on Sexual Mutilations

NOCIRC presents the Fourth International Symposium on Sexual Mutilations, August 9-11th, 1996, at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. World-renown experts on male and female genital mutilation will be gathering to address the human rights, medical, and legal implications of sexual mutilations taking place around the world, include North American circumcision.

There is a striking similarity in the stated reasons for female genital mutilation and male circumcision. In both cases, fears about dirt, sex and attractiveness are given or disguised as social custom. One of the goals of the conference is to publicize to the European community, which does not circumcise, the cultural problem of circumcision in North America.

Whose Body, Whose Rights? Set for Detroit

The new documentary, *Whose Body, Whose Rights?*, will premiere in Detroit on Sunday, October 13th. The showing will be held at the Detroit Marriott Hotel in Troy, Michigan, at 2:30 pm.

This provocative one-hour documentary contains interviews with Dr. Dean Edell, Ashley Montagu, and attorney Charles Bonner. Norm Cohen, Director of NOCIRC of Michigan, is also interviewed.

This documentary, created by Dillonwood Productions, aired recently on PBS television stations in California. It examines the ethics and human rights issues of routine infant circumcision. Part 1, "*Wounding Our Children, Wounding Ourselves*", identifies the problem. Part 2, "*Healing Ourselves, Healing Society*", explores ways that people are creating social change.

As an added bonus, the shocking British television documentary, *It's A Boy!*, will also be presented. In this disturbing and powerful film made by Jewish director Victor Schonfeld, the realities of the procedure and its possible after effects are revealed.

In the film, Mr. Schonfeld manages to convince a mohel to let him film a *bris* (Jewish circumcision). The story then unfolds for one eight-day old boy and his circumcision which, *while being filmed*, goes horribly wrong.

This film elicited an unprecedented response when it was broadcast last year in Britain to overwhelmingly positive reviews.

NOCIRC Exhibit Dates

Volunteers are needed to help staff NOCIRC information tables at the exhibitions listed below. Come and enjoy sharing our message with others! Please call (810) 642-5703 to volunteer.

♦ **July 24th - 27th:**

Ann Arbor Art Fair, downtown, Ann Arbor, MI

♦ **August 31st - September 1st:**

Earthfest '96, Riverland Park, Sterling Heights, MI

♦ **October 5th:**

Birth and Parenting Expo, Ann Arbor, MI

Anita Sherman and her intact son, Jacob, staffing the NOCIRC table at the April *Midwifery Today* Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Speaking With Parents About Circumcision

Strategies for Effective Communication

by Norm Cohen

Don't wait to become an expert to talk to parents about the harm of circumcision. There are too many parents who know nothing at all about this issue. The most important skill you can master as an **Informant** is communicating with parents. Here are some guidelines:

- 1. Focus:** Focus on the mind of the parent. What are they afraid of? What will they understand? How can you help them feel good about not circumcising their son? *Non-medical* reasons are the largest determining factors when parents decide on circumcision for their sons. Focus on their emotions and on their protective instincts, not on their intellect.
- 2. Simplicity:** Keep your message as simple as possible. This avoids protracted debates and mixed or confusing messages. A parent will be more likely to remember what you say. Resist the temptation to overwhelm them with all the facts in our favor.
- 3. Fear:** Parents may already have lots of anxiety about their newborn. Reassure them about how fine it will be not circumcise their boy and how easy it will be to care for him.
- 4. Diplomacy:** To achieve the maximum amount of change of attitude in others, it is best to have a message that deviates only moderately from the lis-

tener's current viewpoint. Avoid extreme statements, even if you believe they are true. An expectant mother or father is probably not ready to hear them and will tune you out.

- 5. Listening:** All circumcision education is actually *re-education*. Everyone feels something about circumcision already. You can help by getting parents talking and expressing their feelings about circumcision. Help them to present the misconceptions they hold. People need to be inspired to think, rather than dictated to. They may come to think about circumcision in a new way. If you listen carefully enough to a parent's explanations, he/she will state or imply what will help them listen to your message.
- 6. Sharing:** It may be helpful to share from your own experience. Don't do this until your contact is ready for it. Sharing how we came to understand this issue can be a valuable way to teach people as long as they are ready to hear it.
- 7. Language:** Words are extremely important in presenting this information. Choose the words that are right for the person, their comfort level, and the degree of their resistance.

Key Points:

- Focus on the emotions of parents as medical consumers and decision-makers.
- Appeal to these parents with a simple message on an emotional level.
- Invoke the natural protective instincts of parents.
- Use an approach that promotes the maximum acceptance with the minimum discomfort in the parent.
- For expectant mothers, explain the pain, suffering, risks and harm to her newborn.
- For expectant fathers, talk about giving his boy something more than he had.
- For everyone, emphasize the small percentage (15%) of circumcised males throughout the world.
- Don't waste your time or energy fighting with people who have already closed their minds. There are so many others that would agree with us, if we could just reach them.

Norm Cohen, of Birmingham, Michigan, is the Director of NOCIRC of Michigan. He has been active locally with NOCIRC since 1994.

BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Real Quotes from Real Doctors

"Circumcision reduces the so-called passion of which so many married men are so extremely proud, to the detriment of their wives and their married life. Many youthful rapes could be prevented, many separations, and divorces also, and many an unhappy marriage improved if this unnatural passion was cut down by a timely circumcision."

Dr. L.W. Wuesthoff, M.D., *Medical World*, 1915

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!
P.O. Box 333, Birmingham, MI 48012

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

STATE:

ZIP:

PHONE: