

■ NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN ■

INFORMANT

EDUCATING A NEW GENERATION — FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ALL CHILDREN

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3, JANUARY, 1998

“Doctor, It's All in Your Head!” **Your Doctor May Be Circumcising the Truth**

by Norm Cohen

When choosing an obstetrician, pediatrician, family physician or urologist, you should never have to be concerned about your doctor's religion or culture. Nor should you have to ask a doctor for his own circumcision status, or the circumcision status of the doctor's husband or sons.

Sadly, however, this is not the case. Mothers and fathers in Michigan have made several reports to **NOCIRC of Michigan** about obstetricians, pediatricians, family physicians, and urologists who repeatedly pressure them to circumcise their sons for “medical reasons” and then proceed to forcibly retract their foreskins.

You trust your child's health care to your doctor based on his or her *medical* skill. Everyone has a right to practice their religious beliefs, free from harassment.

However, your doctor is guilty of fraud if his religious or cultural prejudices are presented to you as medical opinion.

These Michigan doctors have made misleading claims about cleanliness. They have cited outdated studies about infection. They have called parents who steadfastly refuse circumcision “left-wingers” and “extremists.” They have described our efforts to insure the rights of children as “silliness.”

These doctors actually believe their so-called “medical opinions” are correct. This is not a conspiracy. However, they have a conflict of interest. In their own minds, they have not yet separated medical science from their personal beliefs. Thus, they can claim to have the best interest of your child in mind.

Remember though, your doctor is first the product of his or her culture and family. Sometimes a doctor's opinion origi-

nates in the unspoken belief that human sexuality, and the penis in particular, is “dirty.” To your doctor, circumcision therefore makes the penis “cleaner” and “safer.”

Be aware that your doctor may try to frighten you into a decision to circumcise. Fear is a handy way for doctors to get people to follow misguided and irrational advice.

Your doctor is obligated to answer the following questions *prior* to ever providing your son with health care:

1. “Doctor, do you have any religious or cultural or personal beliefs that might prevent you from rendering a fully scientific opinion on circumcision?”

continued on page 4 ⇒

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Michigan's pediatric pain management legislation stalled in the face of fierce resistance from the medical community. Nonetheless, 1998 will be the year circumcisers “discover” pain relief. After years of denials and lying to parents, doctors have finally lost the dispute on circumcision pain. Suffering caused by the procedure was so clear in the study published 12/24/97 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* that researchers stopped the study early because they concluded it was unethical to circumcise without an anesthetic.

Will doctors now hide the damage of circumcision with anesthesia? More importantly, will we anesthetize our outrage about the mutilation circumcision still inflicts?

On behalf of all the children, thanks! Norm Cohen, Director

CONTENTS

- “**Doctor, It's All in Your Head!**” 1
- Director's Message** 1
- Coercion, Not Covenant** 2
- A Nursery Tale** 3
- Local News** 3
- Mission Statement** 4
- Bad Ideas from History** 4
- Become An Informant** 4

Coercion — Not Covenant

A Mother's Open Letter to Her Son

by Cheryl Resnick Ettinger

My Dear Precious Jaime,

You are now five months old and I am so thankful that you have come into our lives. You truly are extraordinary. There is a unique bond that exists between us. When I get close to hug you, you reach up your arms to bring me closer. Through the depths of your eyes our souls meet.

Since you were born we have shared a bed together. You move your sweet body closer to mine to sleep more soundly. You understand so much. When you watch Jordan play, you laugh. When I yell at him for being too rough with you, you laugh, knowing that he got in trouble. I am certain you have said, "Hi" and "Mom" from the time you were four months old.

From the day you were born you reached out to hold my hand as you nurse. Sometimes you break away from my breast in the middle of a feeding. You look up at me with a big smile as if to say, "Thank you so much for that wonderful milk, Mama."

There is no decision I have ever had to make that was as excruciating as your circumcision. To this day I am filled with sorrow and guilt for the unnecessary trauma our religion inflicts on helpless newborn babes.

During my pregnancy I was committed to not circumcising another boy of mine. Your father strongly disagreed with me. We both felt our marriage would be on the line over this decision. I knew that your *bris* would not make you Jewish, but the fact that you were born of a Jewish mother would. I felt it was your body and your choice. I felt G-d made you perfect from the start. I would never circumcise a girl, so why would I do it to a boy?

I remember what it felt like to be strapped to a table and cut by strangers who did not care about me during your brother's cesarean birth. You must know this Jaime, I went through hell to birth you at home with the primary motivation

being to keep trauma as far away as I could from you and me. Circumcising you would have negated all that I went through. I explained all this to your father. I yelled, I cried and I threatened to leave him. He acknowledged the trauma but held steadfast to his religious beliefs.

Every day after you were born, people started asking me about your *bris*. I was now starting to go through post-partum depression and told the family I needed a few days to feel better. They said phone calls had to be made to arrange "the party" on the eighth day. I cried every day thinking about this. I did not know how to tell the family how this ritual horrified me.

I thought of having the family over and then running out the door and kidnapping you. My midwife, Valerie, reminded me that I chose to raise you Jewish. She, of all people, said I should concede.

I was in pure agony over this decision. If I said yes, I would be inflicting this ritual torture on your innocence. If I said no, I would be risking my marriage and creating a different trauma for you. You would be an outcast in our Jewish community.

Oh how I wished there would have been some other woman stronger than I to have paved the way by listening to her heart and shouting: "NO! Stop this madness once and for all." Surely saying "no" then would have been easier. I

The Photo Center, Southfield, MI

could not take on another battle. I took on midwife-attended birth, homebirth, and not immunizing. I was not strong enough in this post-partum abyss to be this area's spokesperson for Jewish non-circumcision.

We plan to send you, like your brother, to a Jewish nursery school. To have your Jewish penis be different would have opened you up to a lifetime of ridicule in this heavily Jewish-populated area we live in. As an adult you could proudly say that you had a mother who chose to leave you intact and not traumatize you. As a child though, I know you could not fend for yourself. Either way seemed like the wrong decision. I/you would lose either way.

I called the *mohel* and told him my feelings. Through a tear-drenched conversation he said he "understood" and would be over the next day to tell me what we needed to have on hand. I asked him if he could do a small ceremonial cut to fulfill the requirement of the law. He told me as a *mohel* he could not. "What about as a human being?" I thought to myself.

continued on page 4 ⇒

The Informant (ISSN 1092-020X) is published three times a year by **NOCIRC of Michigan**. It represents our commitment to provide educational information in this state and to activists everywhere. Articles, comments, and questions are welcome.

NOCIRC of Michigan
Experts In Caring

PO Box 333, Birmingham, MI 48012
Phone: (248) 642-5703
Fax: (248) 642-9528
E-mail: 72202.307@compuserve.com
Norm Cohen, Director
Nora Plank-Champe, Coordinator

Little Goose Recovers

A Nursery Tale

by William Francis Taylor

When my little friend first came out to play
I was very young –
I named him Little Goose
and we found a lot of fun.

Although he never leaves my side,
he's neither me nor mine.
Sometimes when I whisper: wake –
he'd prefer to sleep till dawn.
Sometimes when I'd rather rest –
he wants to jump and play.
Sometimes when I ask him out –
he says: come again some day.

Long before I named him Little Goose,
when he was but a few days old,
so new he smelled of brand-new-baby smell,
Doctor Steel came to visit
and sliced him round the middle
and clamped him past his quick
and ripped away his coat
and branded Little Goose a ring.

The pain it caused me: I did scream.
The doctor said, "He doesn't feel it."
But Little Goose says: The doctor lied.

What kind of Trick
is that to play
upon a newborn child?
To fill his cranial Room of Joy
with screams of red and pain so wild.

The doctor said, "Now he can keep it clean."
But Little Goose says: The doctor lied again.

Dust and oil mix and cling
in tiny tunnels round his ring –
It's worse now than it would have been.

The doctor said, "He won't remember."
But as my yearly numbers grew,
something ever seemed amiss with Little
Goose
though I could never name it –
something missing, something naked,
something not quite right,
a feeling way way before words –
and I never even saw an uncut goose,
till I was almost 22
(perhaps I never looked).

But I can name it now:
My Little Goose is maimed
(I know I'm not alone).

Now Little Goose is getting old –
almost two score years and eight.
And as time hangs tight around his neck –
because of what was done to him,
Little Goose grows more insensate.
Sometimes I have to shout before he hears –
sometimes he hurts before he speaks.

My Little Goose is maimed.
But I will heal him.
That is my right.
That's why I'm here,
to heal my wounds.
That's what I do best.

My Little Goose got hacked one day
when I could not protect him –
and thank you that's enough.
My elders failed to save him then,
but I'll protect him now –
he won't get cut again.

Instead I'll stretch a longer coat
for Little Goose to wear –
a safer, slower method –
I'm told it might take two years.

A brand-new but far-from-perfect raincoat
will protect him from the many storms
will keep him safe and hidden
will make him moist and warm,
and we'll find fun even more exquisite.

And once he gets his brand-new coat,
he won't be my Little Goose, no more.
But then he never was.

/ / /

Dear Moms and Dads – Dear Congress – Men
and Women – Doctors – Please
Give your children a Gift of Love –
Keep their bodies whole and hale –
And protect from nursery crimes
all boys and girls and geese.

© William Francis Taylor 1997

William F. Taylor (Willow) is a husband, father, homemaker and poet in Detroit, (313) 531-8495. He has been an active member of the Men's Wisdom Council of Detroit for six years. Current projects include writing a brochure describing the construction and use of T-tapes for foreskin restoration.

WEB WATCH

www.nocirc.org

This web site from NOCIRC's International headquarters has five new pamphlets on-line, current events, position papers from medical associations worldwide, and lists of books, videos and all NOCIRC centers and affiliates. Proceedings from International Symposia on Sexual Mutilations are also available.

Whose Body, Whose Rights? on PBS

The award-winning circumcision documentary *Whose Body, Whose Rights?* will air in Detroit on PBS Channel 56, WTVS, as early as April. The exact date has not been set. Other PBS stations across Michigan may run the program as well, informing a record number of people about the harm of circumcision.

Restoration Support Group Now Meeting

A support group meets once a month in metropolitan Detroit for men seeking technical as well as moral support in foreskin restoration.

Interested? Please call William Taylor at (313) 531-8495 for more information.

Doctor, continued from page 1

2. "Is a male with a foreskin acceptable in your religion or culture?"
3. "Will you interpret my informed decision not to circumcise my son as a criticism of your religion or culture or parenting?"
4. "Have you been properly trained in the care of the intact foreskin?"

Asking these questions is a diplomatic way of addressing these issues. It is a subtle way for parents to shift the power and control back to them, where it properly belongs.

Most U.S. physicians have not learned proper care for the intact penis. They do not consider the foreskin as normal. Forcibly retracting a foreskin under the guise of an "examination" is their way of expressing disagreement with your decision to leave your son intact. If they don't respect your original decision, this will have painful consequences for your little boy.

Circumcision by doctors represents one hundred and fifty years of professional incompetence, medical malpractice, and old-fashioned quackery.

Parents, be forewarned. The disease that circumcision actually prevents will never be found. With enough religious, cultural, and anti-sexual prejudice, no doubt these doctors will "discover" one. As modern medical consumers, be *ready* and be *aware*.

MISSION STATEMENT
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 on behalf of children to protect them from harm. We are part of a worldwide organization dedicated to ending all forms of male and female genital mutilation.

Any health care provider in Michigan can receive these free pamphlets in bulk for distribution to their clients: "Answers to Your Questions About Infant Circumcision" and "Answers to Your Questions About Your Young Son's Intact Penis." Please call (248) 642-5703 to order.

Coercion, continued from page 2

And so you had your *bris* on the eighth day of your precious life. I cried with you for two hours in my arms before our family arrived. I tried to tell you all that I felt and how miserable making this decision was. I passed you on to Valerie and told you that I deeply loved you. I listened as the *mohel* blessed you. I played the music you heard while nurtured in the safety of my womb, to soothe you.

As the *mohel* announced it was time for the procedure, grandma ushered me out of the room. I screamed out to you, "Jaime, I'm sorry, this was not my idea!" Everyone looked at me as if I had lost my mind. I drank no wine during this sanctification, as there was no celebrating the loss of your innocence, your body's past perfection.

In the time following I have questioned what is this religion that asks me to cut my child's flesh? Is this a test of faith? And faith to whom? An unknown deity, or my perfect child I worked so hard to birth normally? I feel I failed this test. I was not true to that which is mine to behold, touch, nurture and love.

For now, I pray for His forgiveness . . . *Jaime's.*

Cheryl Resnick Ettinger is a childbirth educator and counselor in Southfield, (248) 647-1122. She is working to raise consciousness about natural childbirth, parenting, and education, and to help parents take responsibility for themselves and their children.

BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

"Public health officials and policy makers must begin to recognize the protective effect of circumcision and once again make it available as part of routine delivery services, particularly for low-income minority populations. The informed consent procedure should include data which demonstrates that circumcision can decrease the risk of acquiring HIV disease (AIDS)."

Dr. Deborah A. Cohen, M.D. and Jewish ritual circumciser "Circumcision: An Important Public Health Measure to Prevent AIDS", *Berit Mila Newsletter*, Vol. 2-1, Oct., 1989

FACT: Over 175,000 circumcised males have died of AIDS in the U.S. since 1990, based on Centers for Disease Control statistics.

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!

PO Box 333, Birmingham, MI 48012

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

STATE:

ZIP:

PHONE: