

# ■ NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN ■

# INFORMANT

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

VOLUME 3 — NUMBER 2 — DECEMBER 1998

## *Ignorance Injures Baby Boys*

### Warning to Parents: Your Son Is Unsafe in the Hands of Untrained Doctors

by Jennifer Gardner

Much misinformation continues to be spread about the natural penis, a lot of times by men who were circumcised at birth. They are big advocates of the American custom of routine infant circumcision.

American doctors simply do not know about the normal development of the foreskin of the penis. Many of them are still recommending that intact (non-circumcised) boys need “help” retracting their foreskins with daily perseverance on the part of the parents. This is not only NOT necessary, it's harmful, as the foreskin and the glans (head of the penis) are fused together at birth by a membrane—the same thing that connects your fingernail to your finger.

The foreskin of the infant penis is incorrectly described by unknowing doctors as “tight” and/or as a “cap” in need of “loosening”, “opening”, or removing altogether through circumcision. This condition is mistakenly diagnosed by these ignorant doctors as *phimosis*. This is NOT phimosis; phimosis is present when a previously retractable, *mature* foreskin cannot now be retracted.

The proper care of the intact penis is to *leave it alone*. It can take to early adulthood for the foreskin to complete the natural separation process that enables it to be fully retracted.

Boys are sometimes referred for circumcision after damage has been done to their penis through premature retraction. Most “foreskin problems” in childhood are in fact a result of this forcible retraction.

Many parents have relayed to me that at least once a doctor has forcibly retracted their son's foreskin. “I have to,” these doctors insist, “to see the opening/to check if it retracts/to make sure it stays clean” . . . etc. If doctors would at least read the pamphlet published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (available from NOCIRC), they would know better about the care of the intact penis.

Here are some typical comments I received from mothers:

“When I took my son in for his 6-month check-up, his pediatrician retracted his foreskin back, and she pulled it back far. My son screamed and cried out in an obvious shriek of pain! I remember picking him up and holding him. I began trying to nurse him, but he was crying so hard he couldn't calm down.

*continued on page 2 ⇒*

#### DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Ignorance is a loyal friend of the status quo. So it is not a coincidence that an alarming number of parents are reporting to NOCIRC the forcible retraction of their son's foreskin in a country where circumcision is the status quo.

The forcible retraction of a boy's foreskin is harmful and the first step in a circumcision. However, the sight of an intact penis in a pediatrician's office is a slap in the face to the long-standing social tradition of circumcision. Forcible retraction often comes with an indictment of a parent's informed choice, the spreading of misinformation and a solicitation for surgery. We at NOCIRC are ending the ignorance of normal male anatomy and, in doing so, forever changing the status quo.

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

#### CONTENTS

<b>Ignorance Injures Baby Boys</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Director's Message</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mission Statement</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>FREE Happy Boy Coupon!</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Evidence-Based Ignorance</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Local News</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Bad Ideas from History</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Become An Informant!</b>	<b>4</b>

*Warning, continued from page 1*

"I asked her why on earth she did that—it happened so fast I couldn't stop her from doing it, and I honestly didn't think that she would! Naive and silly me, I trusted her. She said that a number of boys have been coming in to the office lately with urinary tract infections (UTIs). I asked her what made her think my son had one, as he had no symptoms.

"She said that the only way she could see if he had a UTI was to retract his foreskin (wrong!) and told me that I should be retracting it every day. I was still pretty unsure of myself regarding this topic, and dressed my baby and left the office.

"About a week later, the end of his foreskin was still quite red, not inflamed, just red. I knew there was a pediatrician in the same office, an older woman who was from Europe where they don't circumcise. I called her privately and spoke to her of the incident. She told me that the pediatrician never should have done that, and that if I leave it alone it should be just fine."—*Dierna*

"Our pediatrician forcibly retracted our son's foreskin. Now his little penis is inflamed and he cries whenever he urinates. The doctor won't do anything about it; he says he had to do it because the opening of his urethra wasn't big enough. NOT true! He never had problems or irritation before; we just left it alone, besides gently washing without retracting the foreskin.

"The pediatrician admitted he had never seen an uncircumcised penis firsthand. I am so angry and upset, and I feel so guilty I let this happen to my precious boy. I wish someone had warned me about this sooner. *Isn't it ridiculous that we have to instruct medical professionals, who think they know everything, on the proper care of the human penis in its natural state?*"—*Jane*

"At Jasha's 15-month check-up, a female pediatrician tried to forcibly retract his

foreskin without even telling us what she was doing. My husband and I were both there and of course we jumped up when he started to cry. She told us his skin was too tight, it should have been retracted by now, etc.

"We started to argue, so she left and sent in the head doctor who gave us a long lecture (like we were idiots!) about the 'dangers' of being uncircumcised (outdated and erroneous information related to urinary tract infections). He told us that they begin retracting every intact boy's foreskin at one month and every well-baby check-up thereafter until it's fully retractable.

"We made it very clear to these doctors that they should never touch our son's foreskin again, and thankfully they didn't."—*Suzanne*

"At our son's 6-month check-up, we had an older female doctor. We had a nice chat—until the diaper came off. She proceeded to retract his foreskin. He grunted. I didn't physically stop her, but I told her it was contrary to what I had learned about proper care and that I'm from Norway where they have more experience with intact penises because they don't circumcise.

"Honestly, I felt kind of stupid questioning the doctor, and I was taken by surprise that she could be that ignorant. She got defensive and said something about checking for 'phimosis' and then retracted the foreskin AGAIN!

"I wanted to scream. At the time, I was less informed about the whole thing and couldn't remember what phimosis was, although I knew she was wrong. I felt really bad for days afterwards, feeling I had fallen down on my job as mother. I was supposed to protect my son!"—*Benz*

*Jennifer Gardner is from Ann Arbor and the mother of a happy and intact one year-old son. Visit her circumcision information web site at: <http://www.geocities.com/heartland/village/9793/medicalquotes/index.html>*

## 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 fraudulent medical claims. We actively promote the benefits of normal genitalia.

**We** know the removal of normal, healthy tissue from a child's genitals—in the name of medicine, religion or social custom—results in a loss of sexual function and is a violation of human rights.

**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.

**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*

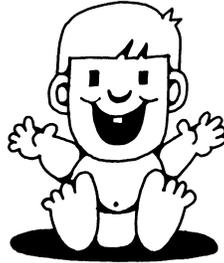
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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Evidence-Based Ignorance

The non-profit medical organization, **Doctors Opposing Circumcision**, (*D.O.C.*) conducted a survey of pediatricians attending the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, October, 1998.

Staffers surveyed 55 pediatricians on seven key points to find:

- 13% do not know the functions of the foreskin

- 22% do not know to leave a child's foreskin alone, to wash only the exterior genitalia, and to allow the child to retract his own foreskin
- 84% do not know that 99% of children's foreskins are fully retractable by age 17
- 25% do not know that the U.S. is the only country in the world that circumcises a majority of its infants for non-religious reasons
- 16% do not know the non-surgical alternatives for treating *phimosis* (a previously retractable, *mature* foreskin now not retractable) and *para-*

*phimosis* (a foreskin stuck behind the glans)

- 27% do not know that their primary responsibility is to provide medical care based on the child's needs, rather than on the wishes of the parents
- 40% do not know that the long-term consequences of circumcision on men's health have never been investigated by the medical community

The results of this survey document the alarming and wide-spread ignorance and lack of training doctors have concerning the normal male foreskin.

## WEB WATCH

[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)

The new **NOHARM** (*National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males*) web site is a powerhouse of facts for anti-circumcision activists and newcomers alike. This well-designed and polished site by Tim Hammond features full-graphic reprints of articles from popular publications and research journals, plus lots of brochures, a non-circumcision notification form, and a harm documentation form.

Assistance is available for activists, plaintiffs and members of the media. An online bookstore & market is your single stop for the best educational resources.

Pat Miller, **NOCIRC of Ohio**, Norm Cohen and Nora Plank-Champe, **NOCIRC of Michigan**, staffing the **NOCIRC** information table on Liberty Street in Ann Arbor, during last summer's art fair.

## “Do You Want Him Circumcised?” Ten Facts Pregnant Parents **Must** Know

- ✓ *Circumcision is the amputation of the foreskin that protects the end of your baby's penis. Every mammal, male and female, is born with a foreskin.*
- ✓ *Now performed less often in the United States. Your baby can be like the other 40% of the boys born in the U.S. today that leave the hospital without having a circumcision.*
- ✓ *Your son's genitals are cleansed easily with water. Circumcision won't make bathing him any easier.*
- ✓ *Circumcision will be very painful for your son, during and after. Just imagine!*
- ✓ *Medically unnecessary. A foreskin is no more prone to disease than any other body part. It is treatable if, and when, diseased.*
- ✓ *Your son's pain will be your doctor's monetary (\$\$\$) gain. He/she is in business to make money!*
- ✓ *Circumcision is a risky surgical procedure. Babies just like yours suffer trauma, infections and hemorrhaging.*
- ✓ *A foreskin provides natural protection to his penis. It is the “eyelid” of the penis. Removing it from your son means he loses this protection for the rest of his life.*
- ✓ *Circumcision reduces the function of the penis. Some natural sensitivity is lost forever.*
- ✓ *Four out of five males worldwide aren't circumcised. Do you really want your son to “lack” like Daddy?*

**Bring Home A Happy Boy — Just Say **NO** To Circumcision !**

✂ **Clip To Save !**

✂ **Give to an Expectant Parent !**

✂ **Share With A Friend !** ✂

### CALENDAR

## NOCIRC of Michigan Exhibit Dates

Volunteers are needed to help staff the **NOCIRC** information table at the exhibition listed below. Come and enjoy sharing our message with others!

Please call (248) 642-5703 to volunteer.

- ◆ **January 15th - 17th, 1999**  
*Health, Fitness and Lifestyle Show*  
Novi Expo Center  
I-96 and Novi Road  
Novi, MI  
10:00 am to 5:00 pm

### LOCAL NEWS

## Defending Babies in the Name of Reason . . .

**N**orm Cohen, Director of **NOCIRC of Michigan**, takes on a hospital circumciser in a lively public debate Sunday, February 21st, from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm, at the meeting of the Humanist Forum of Metro Detroit.

The meeting will be held at the Baldwin Public Library, 300 W. Merrill St., in downtown Birmingham. Call (248) 642-5703 for more information.

**W**riters are needed to create interesting material for our newsletter, **The Informant**. Please call (248) 642-5703 for topic ideas or to propose one of your own.

### CORRECTION

**T**he July, 1998 issue of **The Informant** incorrectly credited Dr. Ronald Goldman with originating the question relating to circumcision: “*If a woman is made to distrust her most basic instinct to protect her newborn child, what feelings can she ever trust?*” This question was actually originated by Miriam Pollack, author of the essay, “*Circumcision: A Jewish Feminist Perspective*” in **Jewish Women Speak Out**, edited by Kayla Weiner & Arinna Moon, 1995.

### BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

## Real Quotes from Real Doctors

*“I have repeatedly seen such cases as convulsions, constant crying in infants, simulated hip joint diseases, backwardness in studies, enuresis, marasmus, muscular incoordination, paralysis, masturbation, neurasthenia, and even epilepsy, cured or greatly benefited by the proper performance of circumcision.”*

Dr. W.G. Steele, M.D.  
“Importance of Circumcision” in **Medical World**  
1902, Vol. 20, p. 518

### TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

## Become An Informant

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