
■ NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN ■

INFORMANT

PREVENTING INFANT CIRCUMCISION — FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ALL

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Mother Knows Best

Preserve Genital Integrity By Preserving the Integrity of Birth

by Laurie Morgan, © 2002

Is circumcision significantly related to popular childbirth practices? Without condemning the true occasional need for assistance in childbirth, it is important that supporters for infants' rights to intact genitals examine the connection between practices that needlessly medicalize healthy childbirth and the Western epidemic of routine infant circumcision.

There is a society-wide acceptance of the medical treatment of healthy mothers and babies in pregnancy. Labor and birth go hand-in-hand with acceptance of other unnecessary and harmful post-birth medical procedures such as circumcision.

In popular Western childbirth, the mothers' protective instincts are too often relegated to the back seat, coming in dead last behind test results and "expert" training and experience. In popular childbirth guidebooks and classes, women are instructed to ex-

pect a lot of pain and terror unless they submit and be a "good patient." Mothers are told to ignore what looks and feels right and makes sense to them, in favor of what they are told is right, by people with much less at stake in their babies' welfare than themselves.

Mothers are discouraged from taking on the powerful role of care provider for themselves and their babies, and instead are encouraged to sit back and let the doctor or midwife "do what they do best." Most often pregnancy, labor, and birth are forced to conform to a specific timetable and other artificial measurements (heart rate, dilation, contraction strength, blood loss, etc.)

In modern childbirth, the baby's feelings and rights are disregarded from the start. Before the baby is even born, his bodily integrity is disregarded with a fetal monitor wire screwed directly into his scalp. He may be vacuumed or extracted from his mother's womb with forceps. Once the

baby's head is born, a bulb syringe is jammed roughly into his mouth and nose to remove birth fluids. As soon as his lifeline — the umbilical cord — is visible, it is clamped and cut, forcing him to make the transition to breathing immediately or suffer brain damage or die.

Once born he is flopped about like a rag doll and scrubbed vigorously with a towel. Afterwards, he is examined, weighed, and swaddled like an unfeeling chunk of meat, far from his loving mother. His eyes are invaded immediately with a protective gel, swelling and clouding his view of his parents' faces and the new world around him.

When such interventions pass for normal in our culture, is it any wonder that so many parents are also willing to hand their babies over for unnecessary and disfiguring genital surgery, believing that the doctor knows better? In order to encourage society to respect the right of a baby to an intact body,

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

When we discuss the topic of circumcision with parents and health care providers, we are often confronted with their denial. Denial for them maintains the illusion that the procedure is harmless, but it makes the stakes in this debate awfully lopsided.

If NOCIRC is wrong about the harm of circumcision, then we are just wasting our time. However, if those who deny the harm are wrong, then they are physically injuring children. In choosing circumcision for their newborn, we believe parents are harming the one person they may love more than anyone else in the world. So, informed consent for parents means more than just having them sign a consent form. It means effective education, advocacy, and activism that can break through their denial.

On behalf of all the children, thanks!

Norm Cohen, Director

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Local Mohel Arrested for OUIL Enroute to Bris

by Norm Cohen

Samuel Greenbaum was on his way to perform a ritual Jewish circumcision (a *bris*) on an 8-day-old infant when he was arrested on a charge of Operating While Under the Influence of Liquor (OUIL) in Commerce Township, Michigan, a few blocks from his destination.

This sounds like a bad joke, but was confirmed by court records and published reports in the *Detroit Free Press*. Mr. Greenbaum was charged June 18, 2002 with an OUIL and a refusal to submit to a preliminary breath test. He is a cantor at Beth Shalom synagogue in Oak Park and a Detroit-area Jewish circumciser (a *mohel*) who performs the ritual that surgically removes a male infant foreskin with a clamp and scalpel on the eighth day after his birth.

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, Greenbaum was pulled over in Commerce Township by an Oakland County Sheriff's deputy who spotted him driving erratically blocks away from the home where he was to have conducted the ritual.

Greenbaum pled not guilty to the charges. His trial has been scheduled for December. He continues to advertise his services in the *Detroit Jewish News*.

It may come as a surprise to many that most ritual circumcisers in Michigan like Mr. Greenbaum are not physicians and are not

licensed by the state to perform circumcisions, nor are they regulated by the federal, state, county, or local governments. They are allowed to perform surgery on the kitchen table in parents' homes.

There are at least five ritual circumcisers in the Detroit metropolitan area who are not licensed or regulated by the state, but they perform hundreds of circumcisions each year in peoples' homes for about \$300 each. Some of these mohels perform the surgery on non-Jews as well.

They are the only surgeons that are able to operate without any governmental licensing or regulation. Even tattoo parlors and their operators are licensed and regulated by local county health departments. No agency is insuring that a circumciser operates with competency and under sterile conditions.

There is no centralized, formal record-keeping to track complications from the surgery, but there is plenty of evidence that they do occur. If a baby has a complication and the parents wish to file a complaint, they have no government jurisdiction to turn to. There is no effective protection for the public against an incompetent circumciser.

Where else is there such a serious gap in regulations when it comes to the welfare of children?

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we must begin by encouraging families to embrace the right and responsibility to make courageous and thoughtful choices about their care, even before conception.

For many families, giving birth in full control, in peace and gentleness and the comfort of home is a better option than the scene I described above. Homebirth is very controversial in our society, and very few families feel informed and supported enough to choose this option even if they

suspect it may be their best choice. How then can we expect them to be empowered enough to make such a controversial decision as to protect their intact sons' genitals from circumcision?

Laurie Morgan is the founder of Joyous Birth League International in Sterling Heights, Michigan. For more information about pregnancy and childbirth choices that respect the welfare and rights of infants, please visit <http://www.JBLI.org>

MISSION STATEMENT

NOCIRC of MICHIGAN

NOCIRC of Michigan is a nonprofit, consumer rights advocacy group that educates people about circumcision and about the benefits of intact genitals.

We inform parents and health care providers in Michigan about the impact of circumcision and about the proper care of intact genitals. We protect consumers from fraudulent medical claims. We actively promote the benefits of intact genitals and foreskin restoration.

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 group of dedicated consumer activists and health care professionals. We are committed to effective education, advocacy and activism on behalf of children to protect them from harm. We are part of a worldwide movement to end all forms of male and female genital mutilation.

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NOCIRC of Michigan Educating a New Generation

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9 Out of 10 Parents Are Not Given Informed Consent When Circumcising Their Son

In nine out of ten decisions made between doctor and patient in routine office visits, the doctor did not discuss issues enough to allow the patient to make informed choices, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in December, 1999 (vol 282 no 24).

While parents should not have the right to consent to the removal of a normal body part from their children, the reality today is that hospitals continue to solicit the consent of parents prior to performing circumcisions. This practice of obtaining informed consent was initiated by patients and their lawyers, not by doctors and hospitals.

George J. Annas, Professor of Health Law at Boston University School of Public Health, explains in his book, *The Rights of Patients*: "Rights help prevent people from being treated as interchangeable, inanimate objects and insist that they be treated as unique persons . . . Rights give us dignity and protection. If we have a right to something, we can insist on it without embarrassment or fear."

Only a competent, fully-informed, fully-conscious and clearheaded adult is capable of granting informed consent to a procedure. They should never be intimidated or threatened to give their consent.

In order to provide a physician with their informed choice about circumcision, parents must understand:

1. the protective, sensory, and sexual functions of the human foreskin
2. the surgical risks of circumcision, including hemorrhage, infection, or disfigurement in 2 to 10% of the cases
3. the pain of the surgery and its aftermath, even if an anesthetic is used
4. the physical and psychological scars left by circumcision
5. the inherent and inalienable right of each human being has to his or her intact body.

There can be no real informed consent until parents have observed a circumcision, either by being present at one or watching a videotape of the entire surgery.

Most parents in the world do not make the choice to circumcise. It may be many years before doctors and hospitals in the United States recognize that parents don't have the right to consent to medically unnecessary and disfiguring surgery. Until then, it is important to provide parents with as much information as possible about the damaging effects of circumcision so they can make the obvious choice to refuse it.

Common Mistakes Parents Make When Circumcising

- ◆ Not knowing that there is no medical organization in the world that recommends routine circumcision.
- ◆ Believing that circumcising their son will make him "look like" Dad or that their son's penis looks "funny" the way it is.
- ◆ Believing that most other boys in the world are circumcised.
- ◆ Not knowing that circumcision is very painful to boys, an anesthetic is often not used, and pain relief is never used afterwards.
- ◆ Believing that a circumcised penis is easier to keep clean than an intact one.
- ◆ Caving in to pressure from relatives who relate fearful anecdotes.
- ◆ Letting doctors and nurses frighten them into agreeing to the procedure because they quote out-of-date or unscientific information.
- ◆ Agreeing to the procedure because it is covered by Medicaid or private insurance and their physician offered to do it.
- ◆ Not knowing that their grandfather or great-grandfather was not circumcised and he was happy just the way he was!

Write to Michigan's New First Mom to End Medicaid Funding for Unnecessary Circumcisions

The election of Jennifer Granholm as the governor of Michigan is our best opportunity yet to remove taxpayer funding for unnecessary circumcisions. As Attorney General, Granholm was a champion for consumer protection. She is the mother of three children, including a young son, and has said that when it comes to governing, she has "a mother's instinct to protect."

The state of Michigan faces a whopping one billion dollar budget deficit, its worst budget crisis in nearly forty years. Governor Granholm has promised to cut at least 5 percent from every department to deal with the looming budget deficit. As the budget deficit grows, we must increase the pressure to end elective circumcision coverage.

Can Baby Boys Count on You?

Did you know that **NOCIRC of Michigan** exhibited at 19 professional conferences and public shows throughout Michigan this last year? Did you know that we have handed out thousands of free pamphlets and reprints to prevent circumcisions in Michigan?

If you feel that **NOCIRC of Michigan** is providing a valuable educational service to babies, children, mothers, fathers, and health care providers, please remember us when making your year-end, tax-deductible donations. Thank you for your support.

The *American Academy of Pediatrics* and the *American Medical Association* have both stated that this surgery is not medically necessary. Routine circumcision will not stand up to objective financial scrutiny because it does not meet Medicaid's criteria of "medically necessary."

The new Democratic governor and the Republican legislature take office on January 1, 2003, and they have already begun drafting the reduced budget. The upcoming budget process runs from January through May.

Grassroots efforts are growing in many states across the nation to stop tax dollars from funding unnecessary circumcisions. This year, the states of Arizona, Missouri, and North Carolina have become the seventh, eighth, and ninth states to drop funding for unnecessary circumcisions in response to their budget crises.

Please write to our new first mom, Governor Granholm, and to the chairs of the Appropriations Committees. You can also complete the "Policy Input" form on Granholm's transition web site to direct your comments to her budget task group.

Ask them to eliminate the waste of unnecessary circumcisions from the Medicaid budget. Tell them that Michigan's Medicaid system should not continue paying for this unnecessary surgery when so many children lack access to basic medical care.

The state money spent on non-therapeutic circumcisions could be far better utilized for medically justified and cost-effective Medicaid coverage for Michigan's children.

Eleven thousand newborn baby boys in Michigan would be saved each year from the waste, fraud, and abuse of infant circumcisions by eliminating Medicaid payments for this needless surgery. Please write today:

Governor Jennifer Granholm

P.O. Box 20008

Lansing, MI 48901

(517) 241-1844

<http://www.granholmtransition.com/policy.asp>

or <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Senator Shirley Johnson, Royal Oak

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BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Real Quotes From Real Doctors

"It would seem really as if a foreskin was a dangerous appendage at any time, and life insurance companies should class the wearer of a foreskin under the head of hazardous risks, for a circumcised laborer in a powder mill or a circumcised brakeman or locomotive engineer runs actually less risk than an uncircumcised tailor or watchmaker."

Dr. P.C. Remondino, M.D.

History of Circumcision from the Earliest Times to the Present

F.A. Davis, Publisher, Philadelphia, 1900, p. 290

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

How to Become An Informant

- ◆ Help us to educate parents and health care providers! A tax-deductible membership fee of \$25 or more makes you a **NOCIRC of Michigan Informant**.
- ◆ Free pamphlets and newsletters are available in bulk to anyone wishing to distribute them to parents & care providers.
- ◆ We exhibit at many conferences and health fairs each year. Please call to volunteer to help staff our information tables.
- ◆ Please let us know about relevant conferences or fairs that **NOCIRC of Michigan** may exhibit at anywhere in the state.

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