

■ NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN ■

INFORMANT

PREVENTING INFANT CIRCUMCISION — FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ALL

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Spreading AIDS by Circumcision

How the United Nations Failed Africa and the World

by Norm Cohen

The United Nations' AIDS-fighting agency admitted last November that it grossly over-estimated both the size and the course of the AIDS epidemic.

The agency now believes that the number of new HIV infections probably peaked in the late 1990s at about 3 million per year. New infections have been dropping since.

Nevertheless, circumcision's last stand in the medical world has come in the form of urgent calls for worldwide circumcisions to prevent the spread of AIDS.

Fools Rush In

The claim that circumcision reduces the HIV infections actually made *Time Magazine's* list of "Top 10 Medical Breakthroughs of 2007".

The basis of these claims comes from three "randomized controlled trials" in Africa among men who wanted to be circumcised.

These short-term trials were *not* truly randomized, *not* representative of the general population, and *not* controlled for condom use and for other relevant behaviors.

Nevertheless, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) wasted no time in recommending mass circumcisions worldwide in March 2007.

"I find the recommendations of the WHO and UNAIDS program a little surprising and even frightening.

This proposal gives a message of false protection because men might think that being circumcised means that they can have sex without condoms and without any risk, which is untrue."

Mariangela Simao
Brazilian Health Ministry

The exaggerated claims about circumcision were quite extraordinary. "The real-world equivalent of an AIDS vaccine," declared Tina Rosenberg in the *New York Times*.

Robert Bailey, professor of epidemiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a circumcision advocate said, "It is permanent and protects every time."

In fact, the three trials proved that circumcision did not protect 64 men who became HIV positive within 2 years after being circumcised.

A Common Lack of Common Sense

The researchers in the trials had to perform 56 circumcisions to prevent 1 HIV infection from occurring in less than 2 years time. The trials were stopped early, before the other circumcised men could ever get infected.

The claim that circumcision reduces the HIV infection rate by 60% was made erroneously on the basis of less than 2 years of study, *not* on the lifetime of a sexually active male.

Researchers never proved that circumcision prevented infection—only that an infection lag was observed in some men who were circumcised.

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

A penis on a baby boy represents a paradox of innocence and sexuality. Anxiety caused by this paradox was resolved by primitive patriarchs by wounding his young penis with a mark. A boy lost some of his innocence and his sexuality in exchange for magical protection which allegedly granted him initiation, identity, and honor in the tribe of his elders.

This loss of innocence and sexuality is exactly why those who work against circumcision equate it with sexual assault. It was born not from freedom, love, or medicine, but from the oppression of patriarchal fabrications.

For those of us who are driven to seek the truth—and not to defend against it—circumcision is the con of a cunning patriarch, demanded from his ignorant and fearful children.

Now a con man has come again to our village. He is promising magical protection from the current plague, if only you pay him off with a piece of your beloved son's penis.

Fortunately, you can deny him the pleasure of stealing his flesh—if you partake of the truth. Distortions are his only means of extortion. The truth will inoculate you and the ones you love.

On behalf of all the children, Norm Cohen, Director

Liar's Dice

A 60% reduction in infection will decrease towards 0% reduction in subsequent years after repeated sexual contacts. Therefore, a claim cannot honestly be made that circumcision prevents HIV infection by 60%.

Nevertheless, this 60% reduction in only 69 men was extended to the general population to predict that millions of infections throughout Africa could be prevented.

The behavior and risk-taking of the men in the studies were different before and after their circumcisions. The circumcised men were reported to have decreased their number of sexual partners and increased their use of condoms, but a reduction in HIV infections was attributed to their circumcision.

Even if the results of the studies were true and all adult men could be circumcised in 10 years, new infections in sub-Saharan Africa would only be reduced by 8%.

The Politics of Circumcision

So as not to be upstaged by the UN, the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) are now considering their own policy statements on newborn circumcision.

"Baby boys should be targeted first, but then attention should switch to adolescent boys and adult men."

Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS

However, a study published last year by the CDC found that black and Latino men in the US were just as likely to become infected whether or not they were circumcised.

The ethnic group with the highest circumcision rate is African Americans and the group with the highest rate of heterosexually transmitted HIV is also African Americans.

African American men are infected with AIDS 8 times more frequently than white men. However, in order not to appear racist in their policy, medical organizations would have to recommend circumcision for all.

At the current HIV infection rate, over 1,500 white males in the US would have to be circumcised to prevent one heterosexually transmitted infection.

Parents Will Say No

An official recommendation from the AAP and the CDC for newborn circumcision to prevent AIDS in the distant future will be a tough pill for new parents to swallow. Circumcision and AIDS are both already well-known to Americans. It's too late for most of us to accept that one prevents the other.

Those who would circumcise anyway will continue to do so with a new excuse that they may claim but didn't really need, and those who would not circumcise still will not.

AIDS never became widespread in the United States. There is no AIDS crisis here, and there never will be. In the minds of the American public, AIDS comes from bad behavior.

If the disease was cancer or some infection that was not sexually transmitted, then the circumcision promoters would have a chance at convincing parents. With a guilt-laden, gay-linked disease like AIDS, they have no chance. Parents are just not going to go there with their newborns, and they are not going to get their older boys circumcised so that they can have unprotected sex!

Parental noncompliance with a recommendation of circumcision will weaken the credibility of the original claim and cast doubt on the significance of the research itself.

Condom-ize, Don't Circumcise

Promoting and funding circumcision is particularly appealing to those having religious beliefs in favor of ritual circumcision or in opposition to the distribution of condoms.

The recommendation is as meaningless as it is flawed. Circumcision advocates propose to persuade men to be circumcised because it will protect them, and then afterwards tell them not to have unprotected sex because it won't protect them. They believe that men are stupid and reckless and will act so even if they are told to use condoms.

Circumcision is not a complementary strategy in the fight against AIDS, it is a *competitive* strategy. What use is circumcision to a man who wears a condom when he has sex? And what use is a condom to a man who has gone through all of the trouble of getting circumcised to prevent AIDS?

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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 healthcare providers in Michigan about the impact of circumcision and about the proper care of intact genitals. We protect consumers from fraudulent medical claims. We promote the benefits of normal 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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Researchers are trying to upstage condoms as the only practical way of preventing the spread of HIV.

Advocating circumcision to prevent AIDS contradicts and undermines 25 years of safe sex messages and leaves tens of millions of circumcised men and their partners at risk for a deadly infection. Condoms are safer than circumcision, cheaper, and they protect women too.

Keeping Women at the Most Risk

Male circumcision reduces HIV infections in women by 0%. Women are the forgotten majority in AIDS suffering. In Africa, HIV in young women is two or three times more prevalent than in young men. Sexually active women of childbearing age have the highest rates of AIDS.

Condoms protect both men and women from getting infected. At best, circumcision would only delay infection in men, but not from transmitting the disease to women.

Promoting the use of condoms would protect women far more than promoting circumcision ever will. However, women weren't factored in by the researchers, except as the ones who spread the disease to men.

Wasting Money Means Wasting Lives

Most circumcisions performed in Africa are done so under nonsterile conditions that spread infections, including HIV.

The cost of one sterile circumcision in Africa is about \$56 US, which would buy 1850 condoms for free distribution. That's a condom a night for five years. The annual per capita income in Africa is only \$745 US.

The estimated cost to circumcise the 120 million HIV-negative men in sub-Saharan Africa would be \$6.7 billion dollars, not including the costs to treat complications. A free condom distribution program for these men would cost \$1.3 billion per year.

The inherent risks and complications of infant circumcision and the costs of treating these complications are never weighed against the supposed benefits.

Significant reductions in HIV transmission could occur in Africa by treating other sexu-

"I have heard that if you get circumcised, you cannot catch AIDS. I don't have to use a condom or worry about all those other ways of keeping safe. I finally get a method that suits me."

Mukasa, a 37 year-old
in Kampala, Uganda

ally transmitted diseases that cause open genital sores. Such an approach would cost much less than mass circumcisions.

Persistent overestimates in widely quoted HIV/AIDS statistics have skewed funding decisions and obscured potential lessons about how to slow the spread of the disease. UN and US bureaucrats overstated the extent of the epidemic so they could win political and financial support for their projects.

Problems like malnutrition, pneumonia, and malaria kill more children in Africa than AIDS.

The Circumcision of Truth

The recent studies received funding because US agencies such as the National Institutes of Health liked the researchers' idea of using circumcision to prevent AIDS.

The primary goal of these American researchers was to find a way to promote circumcision in North America because it has been in decline here. By relying on the urgency of the AIDS epidemic, which we have now learned was exaggerated, they could keep their research money coming in and promote circumcision worldwide.

Meanwhile, circumcision advocates and the mainstream media like *The New York Times* cite only the research that promotes their viewpoint while ignoring or dismissing studies that contradict their viewpoint.

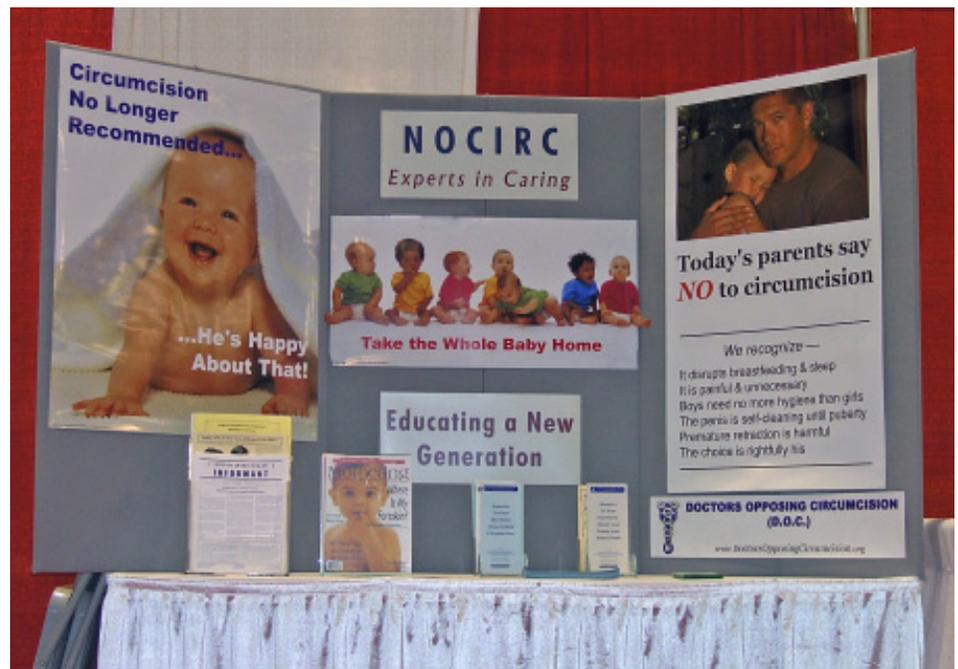
The peer review committees for medical journals aid these advocates in this censoring process by publishing only the research that reaffirms their own viewpoint and the viewpoint of editors and publishers.

In the End, the Truth Triumphs

You can help to spread AIDS by circumcision if you believe the fantastical lie that circumcision protects you, your partner, and your children from AIDS.

Or you can protect yourself, your children, and those you care about by discarding the hype and by using your own common sense.

Citations for the data referred to here are at www.NOCIRCofMI.org/AIDS.htm.



The **NOCIRC of Michigan** display table at the American Baby Faire in Novi, Michigan, March 2007. Over 7,000 new and expectant parents attended the two-day event.

Ask Doctor Foreskin

Protecting Baby Boys and the Men they Become

Dear Dr. Foreskin,

My pediatrician, Dr. Samuel Schwartz, says that I should have my two year-old circumcised. He says that his foreskin cannot be retracted to clean under it and that this is a sign of a disease called "phimosis". He says that I have to be able to retract the foreskin to clean under it or else it will get infected.

—*Worried in West Bloomfield*

Dear Worried,

Tell your pediatrician to keep his circumcising hands off your son's penis or find another pediatrician!

Unfortunately, the normal anatomy of an infant's foreskin is strange and unknown to many American pediatricians. Their most common misconception is that the foreskin is completely retractable early in life and that complete retraction is necessary to keep the penis clean and to prevent infection. This is simply not true.

Even the *American Academy of Pediatrics* guidelines clearly state that no attempt should be made to forcibly retract a child's foreskin. No forced retraction is required for cleaning—soap and water *externally* will suffice. This is common practice in countries that leave their baby boys intact.

A non-retractable foreskin is normal and typical in childhood and it becomes retractable at its own, individual pace prior to adulthood. Forced retraction of the foreskin can cause problems that include adhesions, infections, and worse. So leave it alone!

Dear Dr. Foreskin,

I am a middle-aged man happily married for twenty-five years. My wife and I have noticed that my penis is less sensitive than it used to be. She also complains about painful intercourse. I have read some weird stuff on the Internet about "foreskin restoration". Would that help us? Does it hurt?

—*Help Me in Highland Park*

Dear Help Me,

I have some bad news and some good news for you. First, as a circumcised man, the sensitivity of your *glans* (head of the penis) diminished over time. You have no foreskin for protection, so the skin on your exposed glans thickened and dried out, much like callouses on your hands. This put remaining nerve endings of your penis further below the surface, with a loss in sensitivity.

Now for the good news! Thousands of men just like you have successfully grown a new sheath of skin that looks like the natural covering you were always meant to have. They report a significant return of sensitivity in their glans and greater stimulation for themselves and for their partners during sexual activity. A rolling foreskin provides smoother, more lubricated sexual stimulation for the women they love than does the scraping produced by a circumcised penis.

Foreskin restoration takes a lot of patience and persistence, but it is painless and it really does work. For more information, visit www.RestoreYourself.com.

Information in this column is not meant to replace the care and advice of a fully competent physician.

Volunteers are Needed

Would you like to make Michigan a better place for babies to be born?

Volunteers are needed to help staff the **NOCIRC of Michigan** booths at the exhibitions below. Please join us and enjoy sharing our message with others! Training will be provided. Please call (248) 642-5703.

American Baby Faire

Novi, MI April 5th – 6th, 2008

Midwifery Today

Ann Arbor, MI May 8th – 10th, 2008

Ann Arbor Art Fair

Ann Arbor, MI July 16th – 19th, 2008

Midwives Alliance of North America

Traverse City, MI Oct 16th – 19th, 2008

Now On Sale

T-Shirts @ \$15.00 in sizes S, M, L, XL, 2XL:

Circumcision: I didn't give MY consent

or

Ask Me About Your Foreskin

RestoreYourself.com

Bumper stickers @ \$1.00:

Today's Parents are Saying

NO to Circumcision

NOCIRC.org

Full-Sized Means

Not Circum-Sized

RestoreYourself.com

These items are now available for purchase online at www.RestoreYourself.com or from **NOCIRC of Michigan**, (248) 642-5703. Additional charges apply for shipping and handling.

BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Real Quotes From Real Doctors

"In general, it may be said that the foreskin is a useless, unclean and often harmful evolutionary vestige . . . Circumcision is demanded in all cases of children with nervous diseases . . . Circumcision is often necessary in adults for the cure of venereal or other diseases of the sexual organs."

Dr. G Frank Lydston, MD

Professor of Surgery, State University of Illinois

Sex Hygiene for the Male, and What to Say to the Boy

1912, Hamming Publishing Co, Chicago, p 136, 158-160

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

How to Become An Informant

- ◆ You can now donate online to help us educate parents and healthcare providers. A *tax-deductible* membership fee of \$30 at www.NOCIRCOFMI.org will make you an **Informant**.
- ◆ Free pamphlets and newsletters are available in bulk to anyone wishing to distribute them to parents and 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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