

NOCIRC NEWSLETTER

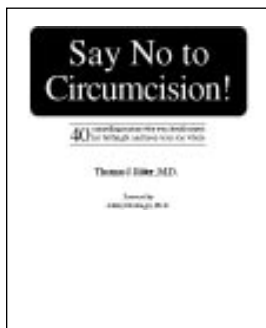
Spring 1992

Vol. 6, No. 1

TWO NEW BOOKS!

SAY NO TO CIRCUMCISION! by Thomas Ritter, M.D. “It is a remarkable fact that there hardly exists a people in the world which does not, in one way or another, mutilate its members. There is hardly a part of the body that has not been the object of what, to the dispassionate observer, would appear to be the calculated wrath of its elders, for it is usually upon the young, and frequently the newborn, that these mutilations are inflicted. Homo sapiens, “the wise guy,” in the name of reason behaves in the most irrational manner, and commits the most atrocious of cruelties upon the bodies of his victims, and sometimes upon his own. Such acts are usually justified by programmatic myths and rituals, as well as by rationalization which serve to “explain” the reason for such practices. The functional role of myths is to provide a sanction for a course of action. Myths in the course of time become comfortable realities. Ritual invests them with importance, and renders them sacred. The myth and ritual of circumcision are of epidemic proportions...

“It is to this challenge, presented by the widely pervasive myth of circumcision in the United States, that Dr. Ritter has magnificently responded in [his] fascinating and highly readable book. As a physician and surgeon of considerable experience, and a deep understanding and knowledge of what circumcision is, its history, development, secular, religious, and medical implications, Dr. Ritter is one of the first medical authorities who has taken a strong stand against the practice of circumcision. [He is] a warm, humane, and very knowledgeable person, who very deeply cares for people, and especially babies, the principal victims of this archaic practice...Dr. Ritter musters all the facts which show beyond equivocation how damaging, from every point of view and consideration, circumcision is...” From the foreword by Ashley Montagu, Ph.D. (Ordering information on page 5.)



“There is one category of men circumcised as babies that most books, articles and studies about circumcision don’t mention and whose existence most experts have not yet acknowledged: men who see themselves as victims of a mutilation but are silenced by humiliation, who would rather have their foreskins intact but cannot face the added humiliation of calling attention to the fact that part of their penis has been cut off.

“They often think they are alone, and pretend contentment or indifference to save face, unaware that there are other circumcised men who have the same feelings and are pretending too. Because they keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves, they are easy to be unaware of — and easy to ignore. That’s one of the reasons circumcision can seem so harmless — you rarely hear from or about the babies it eventually hurts the most.” — John A. Erickson, August 1984



THE JOY OF UNCIRCUMCISING! by Jim Bigelow, Ph.D. “When a young man first discovers the power of his own sexuality, it is always an unforgettable event. For most men, there follows a period, perhaps a lifetime in duration, of interest in human sexuality and in the structures of his own body, and those of others, related to this wonder. Natural curiosity will lead most young American men to discover that most American penises are circumcised, and some are not. Whether this discovery leads to regret and a desire to regain what has been lost is the subject of this book ...The author, in estimating the number of American men who have negative feelings about the circumcision which was forced upon them as an infant, reckons up a number in the millions. In my own independent calculations, I have estimated that probably 90% of the 125 million American men are circumcised. If only 1% of that number regret their circumcision for any reason, there are over 1 million American men who should be acutely interested in the contents of this book...those who are desperate to find information on what has happened to them and to find sympathy and help for their wounds will obtain what they seek.

The author...has treated this subject with the skill and sympathy it deserves. Strangely, physicians who are sworn to use their knowledge and skills to serve the sick and to heal the wounds of humanity have been indifferent to the feelings of injury which circumcision has created in significant numbers of men. This book should fill the gaps of information which the medical profession has yet to address... From the foreword by James L. Snyder, M.D., FACS. (Ordering information on Page 5.)

“The main thrust of the men’s movement is that men are realizing they have to grieve their wounds instead of inflicting them on others.” — Paul Shippee, Denver Post, October 19, 1991

EDITORIAL

My life's work began in 1979 when I heard the screams of a baby being circumcised. Those screams changed the course of my life.

As my work and the work of others became more widely known, more and more men became aware of what had been done to them when they were babies. They, too, began to scream.

In 1980, after an exhaustive analysis of the extensive "scientific" data supporting circumcision, Edward Wallerstein, in his book, *Circumcision: An American Health Fallacy*, exposed the flawed research and researcher bias of that data.

In 1989, because of political maneuvering by a pro-circumcision activist, the American Academy of Pediatrics, which had upheld its stand for nearly two decades, neutralized its position.

Now, two new books by health care professionals challenge the medical community's complacency and complicity about circumcision.

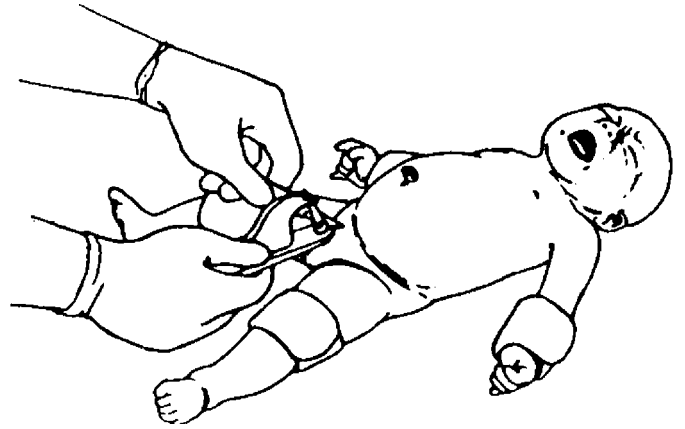
Say No To Circumcision!, by Thomas J. Ritter, M.D., espouses a refreshingly wholesome attitude about the human body and human sexuality. Dr. Ritter, a surgeon, describes the devastating effects of circumcision on normal sexual functioning. The fact that he is not only a medical doctor but, as he states at the beginning of his book, is also intact, gives Dr. Ritter's book an authority among books about circumcision that is unique.

The Joy of Uncircumcising!, by Jim Bigelow, Ph.D., describes the physical and psychological consequences of circumcision both to the individual male and to society as a whole. These consequences can no longer be ignored. In the last decade, American men have begun to articulate what, as babies, they tried so desperately to say with their screams. These courageous men are acknowledging their pain, assessing their physical and psychological scars, and healing their wounds. Dr. Bigelow's book provides information on non-surgical and surgical foreskin restoration techniques.

In a world in which 85% of the male population is intact — and prefers to remain intact — and in which a growing number of the circumcised 15% are making it excruciatingly clear that they would rather *be* intact, those who persist in defending, promoting, and performing circumcision are finding their position increasingly difficult to defend — and their motives increasingly suspect.



"Unless we eliminate institutionalized human rights violations everywhere, none of us is safe."
— Amnesty International



DOCTORS DEMONSTRATE DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF NEONATAL PAIN

K.J.S. Anand, M.B.B.S., D.Phil., and P.R. Hickey, M.D., studied babies undergoing circumcision and reported that infants do experience pain (*New England Journal of Medicine*, November 19, 1987). Their subsequent research indicates that **babies undergoing excruciatingly painful procedures are at increased risk of death due to the stress of surgery** (*NEJM* January 2, 1992). In the same journal, Mark C. Rogers, M.D., wrote "One hundred fifty years ago, surgery was performed under brutal conditions. Without benefit of anesthesia, patients endured excruciating pain; indeed, the belief was widespread that they could die from the 'shock' of surgery. With the advent of anesthesia, this primitive and inhumane era passed. Adult patients could expect complete relief of pain during surgical procedures. Unfortunately, infants and children continued to receive inadequate relief of pain or even no treatment for pain during surgical procedures, and this is often still the case..." In the case of unnecessary surgery, the appropriate alternative to anesthesia is *not operating*.

SUCROSE AS ANALGESIA FOR INFANTS IS MISLEADING

Blass and Hoffmeyer reported in *Pediatrics* 1991 (87: 215-18) that sucrose dipped on a pacifier can reduce pain during circumcision. An article in *The Lancet* (February 1, 1992), however, states "Although these observations beg further explanation, Blass and Hoffmeyer's conclusion, based on the assumption that crying denotes pain and that no crying indicates effective analgesia, is highly contentious...Penile block or caudal block with local anaesthetic solutions must be the most reliable method for pain control during circumcision. In infants these techniques reduce behavioral distress and cardiovascular response, and dampen the rise in cortisol and catecholamines. In contrast, pacifiers may reduce crying but have little if any effect on cardiovascular or stress responses to pain. It is therefore surprising that neonatal circumcision without analgesia is commonly practiced in countries that maintain intensive postoperative pain care for adults."

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia The first tenet of the Australian College of Paediatrics' "Statement on Circumcision" (passed in 1983 and upheld in 1991) states: "The Australian College of Paediatrics should continue to discourage the practice of circumcision in the newborn male infant."

Canada Ontario doctors have been forbidden to perform female genital mutilation after receiving requests to perform the procedure on a growing number of African immigrants and refugees. On January 27, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario declared that any doctor who performs female circumcision or infibulation could be barred from practicing medicine in this, the most populated, province. The college will also ask the federal government to pass legislation making the procedure illegal to prevent non-doctors from performing it. Female circumcision has been outlawed in Britain, Sweden and France. "Some interesting legal questions are arising out of concerns re female circumcision, one of which may be discrimination based on sex, which is prohibited under our Charter of Rights," writes Dr. Thomas Anderson of Summerland, B.C. The existence of the practice in the U.S. has not yet been acknowledged.

France After she was beaten by her father for refusing to be circumcised, Aminata Diop, 23, fled from Mali, Africa, to France. Her request for asylum was denied by the French government because the Charter of Geneva has no provision covering people seeking protection for gender-related circumstances; however, she will be allowed to stay in France, where female circumcision has been outlawed.

United Nations The Report of the United Nations Seminar on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children states "Participants agreed that the persistence of the practice [of female genital mutilation] is due to a multitude of beliefs, traditional customs and social values....Some speakers stated that medical personnel, for...financial reasons, were increasingly replacing midwives and circumcisers and conducting circumcision in hospitals...Spurred on by their greed, they deliberately ignore the sinister aspect of sexual mutilation..." *WIN News*, Autumn 1991.

WHO PROFITS FROM NEWBORN CIRCUMCISION?

The October 7, 1991 issue of *Medical Economics* reports that while 13% of obstetricians in the U.S. charge \$200 or more for circumcision, only 3% of pediatricians charge that much. On the other end of the scale, 6% of pediatricians and 5% of obstetricians charge less than \$60. The average cost for circumcision is \$101. The annual profit from 1.25 million circumcisions each year is substantial.

IN THE FACE OF THE HEALTH CARE CRISIS...

Bringing an end to the practice of circumcision would eliminate: 1) spending millions of dollars annually for unnecessary surgery; 2) costs of medical and surgical intervention following the untoward consequences of circumcision; and 3) legal fees and settlements incurred in medical malpractice litigation.

CNN REPORT ON CIRCUMCISION

Stephen Fernbach, M.D., the American Academy of Pediatrics' spokesperson on CNN, February 4, said, "I think that [the performance of a circumcision] is not adequate for the prevention of AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. The incidence of urinary tract infection, although real, is relatively small, so I think that I could not recommend it as a general public health measure." The CNN Narrator replied: "The American Academy of Pediatrics neither disapproves of circumcision, as it once did, nor endorses it."

EXCUSES, EXCUSES

Circumcision has a strong irrational bias that seeks validation, and the American medical community has used one excuse after another to justify a surgery most of the world scorns. The recent, highly publicised speculation that circumcision decreases the risk of AIDS is so preposterous that few were taken in by it. There are too many circumcised American men with AIDS for this scare tactic to work.

(Isn't it time to start asking what role *circumcision* might play in the transmission of AIDS?) The February 5 *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports: "Lack of Circumcision Increases the Risk of Urinary Tract Infection in Young Men." These "conclusive" findings were based on a study of **only 26 men** with urinary tract infections who were seen at a sexually transmitted disease clinic in Seattle. Most were infected with E coli (bacteria present in both the intestinal tract and feces). From this data we should consider two things: 1) the use of sensational headlines to give credence to a retrospective study of a minuscule population; and 2) that the focus should be on the real issue, i.e., that men who engage in anal intercourse, whether circumcised or intact, should use a condom. Education, please, not another excuse to promote unnecessary surgery.

ANOTHER LAWSUIT FOLLOWS BOTCHED CIRCUMCISION

A \$1 million federal lawsuit, filed on February 5 in Denver, claims the Army urologist who circumcised a newborn boy permanently disfigured and injured the child. The lawsuit alleges the boy suffered pain and a "loss of the capacity for the enjoyment of life." He now urinates from the center portion of his penis and will require future medical and nursing care and treatment.

MAN CONVICTED OF MALICIOUS WOUNDING

A Virginia man was found guilty of malicious wounding for tattooing his 7-year-old nephew. The jury recommended he spend 12 months in jail, pay a \$2,500 fine, and pay a plastic surgeon to remove the tattoo ("B-I-L-L-Y"). The boy's father, who held the child down, will serve one year in jail. This judgment brings Americans one step closer to acknowledging and protecting children's rights to their own bodies.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In Appreciation “It’s quite evident that your cause is based in truth and is set against a standard which is based in ignorance, myth and fear. I am confident that as I spoon-feed your information to my husband, he too will be opposed to harming our baby boy by circumcision.” — Dr. L.C., Flagstaff, Arizona

Custom, Not Medicine “I applaud your efforts to eliminate this barbaric ritual that hides under the guise of a medically indicated procedure. I disagree with the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (of which I am a fellow) passive stance on circumcision. They totally missed the fact that most parents don’t have their sons circumcised for medical reasons, it is done instead out of ‘social custom.’ As a neonatologist...I will not allow circumcision to be performed by the house staff on patients for whom I am the attending physician.” — Dr. J.G., Oregon

Attitudes Make A Difference! “We have a new doctor at our local clinic. He will continue as the previous one did to recommend parents keep their boys intact. To my knowledge, not one circumcision has been performed on boys born in this area since we began our ‘campaign’ all those years ago, Marilyn!” — J.M., California

Next Generation is OK I was unfortunate enough to have been born at the tail end of the last generation in Britain to be subjected to circumcision, which is now a total rarity here. Although our conversion to common sense was too late for me, I take comfort in the fact that the mutilation is virtually unknown amongst the present generation here and to my knowledge, none is any the worse for it. The horror stories about increased cancer, hygiene and so on did not materialize. — J.F., England

I Felt Sorry... “I’ve been against circumcision since I first heard of the procedure when I was about nine. That was 33 years ago. By the time I was 14, I realized I was a member of a distinct minority — owners of a foreskin. I used to avoid having other boys see my foreskin for fear they’d be jealous of me. I felt sorry for my classmates and didn’t want them to be reminded of what had been done to them.” — C.D., Nebraska

Violated “I am a 42 year old physician who was circumcised at birth. I now feel that my body was violated and my phallus mutilated. The work you are doing is admirable and the strength you have demonstrated in questioning the purpose of this barbaric ritual demonstrates undaunting courage. Please provide me with information on foreskin restoration and support groups for unhappy circumcised males.” — Dr. S.M., California

An American Abroad Please send addresses of surgeons in Germany or a neighboring country such as Holland, Denmark, Belgium, France, Austria or Switzerland, or contact groups dealing with the subject of foreskin restoration. This has been disturbing me for well over twenty years, ever since I have been living in Europe, although I think it has bothered me since puberty.” — T.F., Germany

Regrets “I had myself circumcised when I was 21; the worst mistake I ever made in my life. Please send information on restoration. I am 51 years old now.” — R.B., Huntington Station, New York

It Was The Screams “I am a childbirth educator interested to know if you have any videos available. It was actually hearing the screams that impressed me beyond a shadow of a doubt that I wanted my child **not** to be circumcised.” — K.G., Ontario, Canada

Necessary Surgery “I just had to thank you again for the information you sent. We made our decision and our new son came home blissfully intact. When Christopher was 7 weeks old, he underwent surgery to correct a fused cranial suture. Having witnessed the change in personality (our calm, peaceful baby became a fearful, angry one), I was doubly glad we had not put him through such trauma unnecessarily.” — C.H., Bangkok

“If we are to have real peace, we must begin with the children.” — Gandhi

MOTHER NATURE KNOWS BEST

“The anatomists have not studied the form and the evolution of the preputial orifice...they do not understand that Nature does not intend it to be stretched or retracted...What looks like a pin point opening at 7 months will become a wide channel of communication at 17...Nature is a possessive mistress, and whatever mistakes she makes about the structure of the less essential organs, such as the brain and stomach, in which she is not much interested, you can be sure that she knows best of the genital organs.” — Sir James Spence (1964)

BULLETIN BOARD

- Call for Abstracts: You are invited to submit an abstract for presentation at the Third International Symposium on Circumcision which is tentatively planned for March 30 through April 2, 1993, in Washington, D.C. Please send the following: your full name with credentials, address, and telephone number; your proposed presentation title; your abstract of 250 words or less; a clearly written goal of your session, along with three objectives; a brief description of your speaking experience. Send to International Symposia on Circumcision, P.O. Box 2440 Sixteenth Street, Suite 250, San Francisco, CA 94103. Deadline: October 15, 1992.
- *Say No To Circumcision! 40 compelling reasons why you should respect his birthright and keep your son whole*, by Thomas Ritter, M.D. Ask for it at your bookstore or send a check to NOCIRC, P.O. Box 2512, San Anselmo, CA 94979 (128 pp, 8-1/2 x 10, \$10.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling, California residents add \$0.95 sales tax).
- *The Joy of Uncircumcising! Restore Your Birthright and Maximize Sexual Pleasure*, by Jim Bigelow, Ph.D. Ask for it at your bookstore or send a check to UNCircumcising Information and Resources Center (UNCIRC), P.O. Box 52138, Pacific Grove, CA 93950 (240 pp, 8-1/2 x 10, \$16.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling, California residents add \$1.45 sales tax). "You don't have to be unhappy with your circumcision to love this book! The author and publisher have performed a monumental service to millions of American men and infants yet to be born." Ronald Goldman.
- *Decircumcision (Circumcision Practices & Foreskin Restoration Methods)*, by Gary Griffin, MBA, available from Second Skin, 1335 Kentucky Street, Dept. 5, New Orleans, LA 70117 (108 pp, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2, \$14.95.)
- "Circumcision: A Medical or Human Rights Issue?" by Marilyn Milos and Donna Macris, *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery*, March/April 1992, is available as a reprint. Send SASE and \$3.00 to NOCIRC, P.O. Box 2512, San Anselmo, CA 94979.
- *Traitement Medical Du Phimosis Congenital De L'Adolescent (Medical Treatment of Congenital Phimosis in Adolescents)*, by Docteur Michel Beauge, describes the treatment of phimosis without surgical intervention. This paper is available (in French only) for \$10 (U.S.) from the Association contre la Mutilation des Enfants (AME), 50, Boulevard Jean Jaures, 92100 Boulogne, France.
- "The Mystery of Routine Infant Circumcision in the United States," by J. David Roberts, November 1991, (36 pp, prepared for Human Sexuality and Interpersonal Relations class at a Christian seminary), is available from NOCIRC for \$5.00.
- "Power Formation" and "Benjamin's Brit Am Yisrael/Naming Ceremony," are available from Drorah Setel, 1738 26th Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98112-3014. Send \$2.00 and SASE with \$0.75 postage.
- *The Whole Issue*, South Africa's circumcision information newsletter, is published and distributed free of charge by Larry Murphy, P.O. Box 32899, Braamfontein 2017. He also provides the NOCIRC Newsletter and "Circumcision Why?" pamphlet.
- *Journeymen, A Quarterly Magazine Exploring Men's Issues*, has taken up the issue of circumcision. Yearly subscriptions \$18.00. Canadian subscribers/\$24 U.S. funds. Send check or money order to: Journeymen, 513 Chester Turnpike, Candia, NH 03034.
- "The Uncut Version," a short video-documentary on the benefits of having a foreskin, will be available early this summer. For order information contact: Cadigan Productions (415) 965-7776.
- In Boston: Circumcision Resource Center, P.O. Box 232, Boston, MA 02133, (617) 523-0088, Ronald Goldman, Executive Director. For a copy of Ron Goldman's article in the Spring issue of Wingspan, send an SASE and \$2.00 to the Boston Center.
- The Association Contre la Mutilation des Enfants (AME) is boycotting the I.C.I. Clinical Group because of its popular press advertising campaign for anesthetics which use child models displaying their surgical bandages. Unwarranted surgeries on children are increasing in France and, according to AME officials, I.C.I. profits in France have increased 25% since 1990.
- NOCIRC Headquarters needs a Fax machine, in case you're wondering how you can help.
- Credit goes to Johnny Pelton of Clark, NJ, for this quote in the Fall Newsletter: "And the day came that the child was spared that slice of disrespect. And, in gratitude, the child looked out with a crystal clear eye that had a calming effect upon all of humanity."

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I DID NOT KNOW...

"I did not know until this month that something was surgically amputated from my body without my consent. I did not know that some of the sexual problems in my life are linked to this genital mutilation. I did not know that my mother, who was supposed to protect me, signed away my foreskin and gave me incredible pain. And Dr. Ross Wilson collected \$25 for that piece of tissue.

"In the Army, I made fun of the few boys I saw in the showers who still had 'em...Guys, I didn't know any better.

"Well, I match my father, that's for sure. I saw the old man's penis when I put him in the Connecticut State Hospital. 'You were drunk again. I was angry. They stripped you naked in front of me. I saw your penis. By God, we matched!' And I turned in shame, overcome by the echoes of Noah's sons seeing their father drunk and naked.

"What's my personal conclusion? The surgery wasn't needed, wasn't necessary and was medically unjustified...this blood sacrifice done to me. I feel this culture worships pain, practices punishment, and that circumcision was, for me, the beginning of the chain of child torture that passes for parenting in this zombied society. No pain, no gain. I hope you young mamas and you papas will resist the urge to revenge, resist the temptation to chop off the foreskin of your babies. In the words of Sean O'Casey, 'O Lord, take away our hearts of stone and give us ones of flesh.'" Barry Boland, KUSP Radio, January 10, 1992.

If

... you think you're too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito." — Bette Reese

...our information helped to save your son, grandson, husband, or you,

...we sent you information for your own use or that you could pass on,

...we sent information to someone for you,

...you think our work is valuable, you should know that we couldn't do it

...it weren't for you.

So, please continue to support our work. Your donations are tax-deductible.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION of CIRCUMCISION INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTERS

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