Circumcision: Changing the Conversation

Christopher L. Guest MD, FRCPC
Kira Antinuk, RN, BScN
IT'S A BOY!
Global Map of Male Circumcision Prevalence at Country Level:

- no data
- 0–20%
- 20–80%
- 80–100%

According to WHO:
who.int/hiv/pub/malecircumcision

“Fine Touch Pressure Thresholds in the Adult Penis” BJU International 2007 Apr;99(4): 864-69
6th Dynasty Ancient Egypt (2400BC)
Semitic Tribes in Middle East
Ancient Greece
Middle Ages
Victorian Era
“Treatment of Self-Abuse and Its Effect – Plain Facts for the Old and Young” Segner & Co (1888) p. 107
Edward Dixon declares circumcision cures masturbation.

“A Treatise on Diseases of the Sexual Organs”, Burgess Stringer and Co. 1845, pp. 158-65
1855 Jonathan Hutchinson claims circumcision prevents syphilis.

“On the Influence of Circumcision in Preventing Syphilis”, Medical Times and Gazette 1855;32(844): 542-543
1865 Nathaniel Heckford claims circumcision cures epilepsy.

“Circumcision as a Remedial Measure in Epilepsy and Chorea” Clin Lectures London Hospital 1865:2: 58-64
1870 Lewis Sayre claims circumcision prevents spinal paralysis.

“Paralysis from Reflex Irritation of Adherent Prepuce” American Medical Association 1870;21: 205-11
1873 Joseph Bell claims circumcision cures bedwetting.

“Nocturnal Incontinence Cured by Circumcision” Edinburg Medical Journal 1873 May;1(9): 1034
1875 Lewis Sayre declares circumcision prevents scoliosis, paralysis of the bladder, and clubfoot.

“Spinal Anaemia from Irritation of the Genital Organs” American Medical Association 1875;26: 255-74
1879 H. Kane claims circumcision cures nocturnal emissions and abdominal neuralgia.
1881 Maximillian Landesberg claims circumcision cures all eye problems.
1890 William Gentry claims circumcision cures blindness, deafness, and dumbness.

"Nervous Derangements Produced by Sexual Irregularities in Boys" Medical Current 1890 Jul;6(7): 268-74
1894 P. Remondino claims circumcising Black men prevents them from raping White women.
1894 H. Rosenberry claims circumcision cures rectal incontinence.

“Incontinence of Faeces, Cured by Circumcision” Medical Record 1894 Aug 11;4(6): 173
1914 Abraham Wolbarst claims circumcision cures tuberculosis.

“Universal Circumcision as a Sanitary Measure” JAMA 1914 Jan 10;62(2): 92-7
1926 Abraham Wolbarst claims circumcision prevents penile cancer.

“Circumcision Prophylactic against Penile Cancer” Cancer 1926 Jul;3(4): 301-10
1942 Abraham Ravich claims circumcision prevents prostate cancer.

“The Relationship of Circumcision to Cancer of the Prostate” J Urol 1942 Sept;48(3): 298-9
1949 Eugene Hand claims circumcision prevents prostate cancer, venereal disease, & cancer of the tongue.

“Circumcision and Venereal Disease” Archives of Dermatology 1949 Sep;60(3): 341-6
1949 Abraham Ravich claims circumcision prevents cervical cancer.

"Prophylaxis of Cancer of the Cervix by Circumcision" New York State Journal of Medicine 1951 Jun;51(12): 1519-20
You can put lipstick on a pig, but it’s still a pig.


• Primum non nocere
• Autonomy
• Proportionality

“UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights” October 19, 2005 Article 8
Trigger warning: disturbing images.

Article 6  “...every child has the inherent right to life and bodily integrity...”
Article 37a “...no child shall be subject to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment...”
Article 34a “...no child shall be subject to sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual torture...”
Article 24c “...no child shall be subject to traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the child...”

Conversation Points

- Uncircumcised, shift to term “intact”
- Most boys in Canada are intact
- Foreskin is complex, specialized structure
- Sexual functions for males & females
- From religious ritual to Victorian quackery
- Circumcision: the “cure” in search of a disease
- Intact care is easy: do not retract foreskin
- Physician biases – Examining our motivations
- Does circumcision pass medical ethics tests?
- Human Rights & Equality