



Medicine and the True Cost of Being in Denial

"The danger of breast cancer from induced abortion constitutes a serious health risk, and women deserve to be fully and properly informed about it. The failure to inform them on the part of the medical establishment and on the part of various cancer watchdog groups is noteworthy and troubling."



Back in the early 1800's, most practicing physicians refused to believe that the simple gesture of washing their hands between patients could help prevent the spread of childbed fever among the pregnant women they examined. Even in the face of compelling scientific evidence, they remained stubbornly opposed to the practice. As a result of this intransigence on the part of the medical establishment over a period of many years, childbed fever (also known as puerperal infection) ended up unnecessarily claiming the lives of thousands of young women.

Today, a similar intransigence exists among many physicians who refuse to "wash their hands" of abortion; they also fail to acknowledge a key and dangerous effect of abortion on women's health, namely, an increased risk of breast cancer. Abortion of a woman's first pregnancy has been shown to correlate with an elevated incidence of breast cancer. Yet the medical community, by fostering the practice of abortion, has stubbornly ignored this link, refusing to inform women about this serious health risk, even in the face of compelling scientific evidence. This long-running intransigence means that women today, not unlike the 1800's, continue to die unnecessarily.

In the 1840's, when Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis began requiring that physicians and medical students wash their hands before examining women or delivering their babies, the mortality rate dropped from 18% to 1.3% in the maternity ward in the hospital in Vienna. Yet most of Dr. Semmelweis' co-workers thought handwashing was a waste of time, and refused to comply or acknowledge its importance until several more decades had passed. Meanwhile, year after year, he continued to provide statistical evidence that handwashing saved lives, and, year after year, he was criticized in scientific journals, and ridiculed by leading physicians throughout Europe. Semmelweis was eventually fired from his job at the hospital because of his insistence on handwashing.

Those who were supposed to be dedicated to saving lives in the medical establishment of the early 1800's were instead more concerned about political correctness and preserving their own entrenched academic interests. Best medical practice became subordinated to other pressures and misguided beliefs.

Today's medical establishment faces a similar temptation of

Making Sense of Bioethics

Medicine and the True Cost of Being in Denial

placing certain irrational ideologies ahead of a patient's best interests. As modern medicine subtly morphs into a schizophrenic discipline that at times works to save young human patients in the womb, but at other times works to harm that same patient population through abortion, it becomes but a short next step to downplay or ignore the harmful effects that abortion has on women, as in the case of the abortion-breast cancer link.

More than 28 different studies over a period of 45 years have shown abortion to be a significant risk factor for breast cancer. Beyond this epidemiological evidence, it has also been shown that childbearing to full term for a woman's first pregnancy, especially at an early age, affords a significant protective effect against breast cancer.

A number of scientists and physicians (especially those with connections to the abortion industry) have been quick to suggest that these research results were "inconsistent" and that they could not really arrive at "definitive conclusions." As a result, young women today rarely receive sound medical information about these risks to their health. Abortion is aggressively marketed as a "woman's

right" and has become one of the most common and lucrative surgical procedures today. So many within the medical establishment, including various professional associations like the American Medical Association, seem to shy away from serious discussions of abortion's health risks. A few years ago, George Lundberg, M.D., former editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, noted during an interview with *Health Affairs* magazine how certain topics like abortion and tobacco were "sensitive issues" that had been on the American Medical Association's "don't touch" list for many years.

The danger of breast cancer from induced abortion constitutes a serious health risk, and women deserve to be fully and properly informed about it. The failure to inform them on the part of the medical establishment and on the part of various cancer watchdog groups is noteworthy and troubling. Until the practice of modern medicine once again includes a repudiation of direct abortion as part of its professional creed in the way it once did when physicians took the Hippocratic Oath, little progress will be made in addressing a number of serious women's health issues linked to

abortion, including breast cancer.

Modern medicine still desperately needs to break free from its posture of denial and to wash its hands of the unsavory and immoral practice of abortion if it ever hopes to minister in a fully responsible way to the health needs of modern women.

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. Father Tad writes a monthly column on timely life issues. From stem cell research to organ donation, abortion to euthanasia, he offers a clear and compelling analysis of modern bioethical questions, addressing issues we may confront at one time or another in our daily living. His column, entitled "Making Sense of Bioethics" is nationally syndicated in the U.S. to numerous diocesan newspapers, and has been reprinted by newspapers in England, Canada, Poland and Australia.

