

Some Thoughts from the Heart of a Pediatrician

As a Pediatrician and mother I am grieved at Minnesota's plan to pass an extreme law to abort babies up until the time of a full term birth for any reason whatsoever. In medical school I learned about the creation of a new diploid cell that had both maternal and paternal genetic material at the time of conception that multiplied to become an embryo, a fetus and finally a fully formed baby. I loved my embryology class that showed the stages of development. At every stage along the continuum the developing child was unique yet still in need of nutrition and protection through interplay of umbilical cord and placenta connected with the mother's body. Science has revealed that cells from the developing baby can transfer to their mother and she then carries some of this new genetic material —what a wonder! In Medicine we have been able to watch the fetus on ultrasound develop at all stages and in the NICU can now help a preterm baby as young as 23 weeks survive and grow. I have a few of these little ones in my medical practice who are now toddlers and preschoolers and rejoice in their progress toward adulthood.

Why don't we, as a society, see the pre-born child as a person? That question has bothered me since I was a young girl. Or do we see them as a person but as secondary to the mother who is more important? Only those of us who are mothers can truly speak to this. Only the mother who has sacrificed her bodily autonomy, energy, time, comforts and fears through pregnancy and delivery to hold her baby in her arms knows the truth. Most of us would die for our children and say they are more important than us! Some heroic mothers have died to save their children, denying cancer treatment during pregnancy or putting their bodies in the way of harm in order to protect their children. Most us die daily in self-sacrifice as we give of time and resources in order to love and support our children, even after they are no longer living with us.

I think that our culture tries to avoid self-sacrifice and sees it as evil. We want control over our lives, no surprises, no pain, no deviations to our plans. Yet, life is never fully under our control, as those with cancer, an untimely death in the family, accidents, rape and other traumas can attest to. None of us can plan how our lives will exactly turn out despite our trying to tie up all the loose ends. I see abortion as one attempt at grasping for control, shutting out the interruption to the plans of school, career, life as I want it to go, and avoiding the sacrifices that a pregnancy demands. One of my children was conceived when my body was still recovering from 2 prior close pregnancies despite following all the rules to prevent another pregnancy when I was not ready for another child, and another needed me to spend 10 weeks on bedrest due to a placenta previa. Of course I was angry and railed initially against the inconveniences, job and family stressors and the changes to my plans. I even blamed the baby and was angry at him! But, those 2 boys are now sensitive and loving young men who I can't imagine life without, who are bringing their different gifts and talents into the world for the better. I can understand the fears and anger of an unplanned pregnancy —it is real. But is abortion the best answer?

In my practice, there are several teen moms who successfully delivered their babies and who are finding new purpose in being mothers, making good choices with the support of their families and other important people around them. Sometimes it is the grandparents who pick up the job of raising those children and find new joys and purpose in that process. Of course it is not easy and there are sacrifices. I also have more teens than I can count who have aborted and struggle with depression after the initial relief. We are in a mental health crisis in our teens right now and I submit that some of the depression and anxiety is due to abortion. These young women in both camps need our support, love and care! But I don't think abortion needs to be the answer. Castrate the rapist, make it easier for young moms to make it financially with housing, daycare, community and parenting support, shut down the pornography empire that uses women and children for sexual gratification, stop making the abortion industry a lucrative

business that preys on young girls in crisis for financial gain, and stop sacrificing the next generation on the altar of expediency.

I think the quick solution of abortion will come back to haunt us in the future with women crippled with regrets, without the children who may have comforted them as they aged, given them purpose and expanded their capacity for love. If we can kill our own children, what other evils can we live with or commit ?

Barbara Hadley Bittner,MD
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