

# Respect for Life from Conception

*American College of Pediatricians – October 2009*

**ABSTRACT: The American College of Pediatricians, being truly dedicated to all children, affirms the health and lives of all pediatric patients equally. Many medical and mental health organizations profess to be dedicated to the health of all children, yet some espouse neutrality on the issue of induced abortion and recommend that pregnant adolescent women consider “all pregnancy options.” The American College of Pediatricians finds this position to be scientifically untenable and wholly unethical.**

Abortion throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy became legal in all 50 states when the US Supreme Court issued its decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* in 1973.<sup>i</sup> Since human life begins at conception,<sup>ii,iii</sup> there are two pediatric patients involved when a teen undergoes an abortion: the child in utero and the adolescent woman. The College affirms the equal right to life of both the adolescent woman and her unborn child.

Advocates often claim that abortion procedures are necessary to preserve the health and life of the mother. Such situations, however, are exceedingly rare.<sup>iv</sup> Induced abortion is almost never necessary to treat a pregnancy-related maternal condition. Instead, it is typically possible to preserve the health of both mother and child via an induced pre-term delivery.<sup>v</sup>

As the College reiterates its opposition to the termination of an in utero human life by any means, the College also calls attention to the morbidity and mortality induced abortion presents for both adolescent women and their children. Abortion-associated morbidities include the increased risk of subsequent substance abuse, anxiety, depression, breast cancer, and premature births (which endangers the health of the newborn).<sup>vi,vii,viii,ix,x,xi,xii,xiii,xiv</sup> While

maternal deaths due to abortion are rarely reported,<sup>xv</sup> recent studies document a greater incidence of both abortion-associated “natural cause” mortality and abortion-associated violent deaths (including suicides, homicides and accidents) when compared with women who deliver at full term.<sup>xvi,xvii,xviii</sup>

Disappointingly, while there have been documented cases in the lay press sufficient to warrant passage of the Born Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002, the medical literature has remained silent regarding the incidence and fate of infants born alive during late-term abortion procedures.<sup>xix</sup> Depending on the abortion procedure employed and the degree of resuscitation provided, the surviving infant may face subsequent physical, emotional and cognitive impairments. For this reason, the College insists that during any abortion procedure involving potentially viable fetuses, a healthcare professional skilled in and dedicated to the resuscitation of newborns be present.

It is unfortunate that the medical community has been persuaded by shifting societal ideology and existing civil law in its determination to affirm the rights of viable patients over those dependent upon a uterine environment for their survival. Civil law cannot take the place of conscience or dictate moral

norms. Societal standards must be characterized by a moral basis of respect for all and especially for the rights of the weakest and the most defenseless. The central issue is not viability but rather the inviolability of all human life from conception to natural death. As pointed out by Paul Ramsey in 1975, "The fetus is generally viable at all stages unless it is removed from its natural environment."<sup>xx</sup> The limitations to fetal viability have undergone considerable change over the past 36 years and it is anticipated that medical advances will continue this improving trend. A court, society or the medical profession should not define personhood on the basis of such changing measures.

With the imperative of the medical profession to preserve the health of all

patients, the College looks forward to the day when all children will be treated with the respect deserved by each human being, regardless of gestational age, medical condition, or social circumstances.

Pediatricians must advocate for all children, not just for those deemed "viable" or "worthy of existence." Pediatricians should honor the advocacy once proclaimed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (some thirteen months preceding *Roe v. Wade* in 1972) that a pediatrician's responsibility for the child should extend from conception through young adulthood.<sup>xxi</sup> Physicians must uphold scientific integrity and speak out against further "sacrifice" of the in utero child. The College shall not waiver from this commitment.

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*The American College of Pediatricians is a national medical association of licensed physicians and healthcare professionals who specialize in the care of infants, children, and adolescents. The mission of the College is to enable all children to reach their optimal, physical and emotional health and well-being.*

## References

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