



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS TASK FORCE ON CIRCUMCISION

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In April 2010, the Bioethics Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) astonished the world with a new Statement¹ calling for a relaxation in the federal law prohibiting all forms of female genital cutting (FGC). The Statement suggested that pediatricians should be able to perform a 'ritual nick' on the clitoral skin of young girls whose parents – for cultural reasons – might otherwise subject them to more extensive ritual genital surgery as traditionally practiced in certain areas of Africa and the Middle East.

In the Committee's justification of its new policy, it stated:

"...many forms of female genital cutting are less extensive than the newborn male circumcision commonly practiced in the West."

Thanks to the tens of thousands of messages sent to the Academy by outraged opponents of FGC, including Intact America's constituents, the Academy reversed its call for relaxing female genital cutting laws. In a letter to Georganne Chapin, Executive Director of Intact America, dated June 2, 2010, AAP's Executive Director Errol Alden, MD, confirmed the retraction, and cited: "The AAP does not endorse the practice of offering a 'clitoral nick.'" The letter also quoted AAP President Judith Palfrey, MD, as saying "...it is important that the world health community understands [sic] the AAP is totally opposed to all forms of female genital cutting, both here in the U.S. and anywhere else in the world... The AAP's goal is to protect the health and well-being of all children."

Dr. Palfrey continued, "One good thing to emerge is that this discussion has shone [sic] a bright light on this issue and raised the world's awareness about this harm to young women."

Intact America asks, "Hasn't this discussion shined an even brighter light on the issues of the genital cutting of *all* children?"

The AAP's current statement on newborn male circumcision, issued March 1999, considers the practice – like female genital cutting in countries where it is customary – to be part of a cultural, religious and ethnic tradition, rather than a medical intervention. It also states that "pediatricians must always resist decisions that are likely to cause harm to children."

Clearly, the Academy has now placed itself in a very difficult position: attempting to justify surgically altering the genitals of boys for cultural reasons, while having just roundly condemned the surgical alteration of girls' genitals for cultural reasons.

The contradictions evinced by the Academy's issuing, and then quickly repudiating, an ill-considered female genital cutting policy has exposed its longstanding history of having ignored the harms of male circumcision.

Even stranger, the Academy is currently engaged in an utterly confounding process; a Task Force is currently meeting to consider whether to actually *recommend* circumcision for normal, healthy baby boys in the United States.

This would be an extraordinary betrayal of the Academy's goal to protect all children *equally*.

Enough is enough! Intact America calls upon the AAP to adopt a position acknowledging that both girls *and* boys have the right to an intact body, that they be free from genital cutting by doctors or any other ritual practitioners – and to recommend that pediatricians NOT engage in the cutting of children's genitals.

Ultimately this is a gender equity issue - and therefore one of basic human rights. If it's not right to cut the normal genitals of baby girls, how can it possibly be right to cut the normal genitals of baby boys?

In our shared goal to protect "all children," we at Intact America call upon you, the members of the Task Force on Circumcision, and the general membership of the American Academy of Pediatrics, to have the courage, wisdom, and integrity to declare that physicians stop cutting ALL children's genitals.

Georganne Chapin
Executive Director
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¹ "Policy Statement. Ritual Genital Cutting of Female Minors, Committee on Bioethics, Pediatrics Online version, April 26, 2010; published in print version of Pediatrics, May 2010.