

POLICY & PRACTICE

Keepsake Ultrasound

The American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) is taking a tougher stance on the use of ultrasound for nonmedical purposes. Only images or video clips given to patients during a medically indicated ultrasound exam are consistent with the ethical principles of physician professional organizations such as the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the AIUM said in a new position statement. Fetal ultrasound scans should be performed only by either physicians or registered (or

registry-eligible) sonographers. These professionals have been trained to recognize medically important conditions and know techniques to avoid excessive ultrasound exposure. AIUM said that added cost arrangements—other than providing patients with images or copies of their medical records at cost—may violate professional ethical principles. AIUM's updated position statement was developed by a task force created to consider the various aspects of the use of ultrasound for entertainment. The task force also considered comments from AIUM members.

Court Upholds Military Abortion Ban

A federal appeals court last month struck down a decision that required the military to pay for an abortion by a woman whose fetus was anencephalic. Congress has prohibited the military from using federal funds for abortions except in cases in which the woman's life would be endangered if the fetus were carried to term. The woman, who is the wife of a naval enlisted man, won a lower court decision forcing the military to pay for her abortion. She argued that, because the fetus had a fatal birth defect, carrying the fetus to term would not serve the state's interest of preserving life. But the government appealed the ruling to obtain

reimbursement for the cost of the procedure. The three-judge appeals panel found that the prohibition on the use of federal funds for abortions does serve a "legitimate government purpose." The woman can now choose to appeal the ruling to the full appeals court in the 9th circuit or appeal directly to the U.S. Supreme Court.

NIH Funds New Stem Cell Centers

Officials at the National Institutes of Health have funded three new Exploratory Centers for Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research. The centers are located at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, and the Burnham Institute in La Jolla, Calif. The centers will receive about \$9 million over 3 years. Each center will set up a core facility to support and train scientists and to identify the growth conditions and molecular characteristics needed for maintaining human embryonic stem cells in an undifferentiated state. The NIH has already funded three stem cell research centers. All of the centers are limited to using federally approved stem cell lines that are listed on the NIH Human Embryonic Stem Cell Registry.

Barriers to Birth Control Use

Conspiracy beliefs may affect birth control use by African American men and women, according to a study published in the journal Health Education and Behavior. More than one-third of African Americans surveyed agreed with the statement "medical and public health institutions use poor and minority people as guinea pigs to try out new birth control methods." And only half of those surveyed agreed with the statement "the government tells the truth about the safety and side effects of new birth control methods." However, a greater percentage of men agreed with specific conspiracy statements than did women. "In general, men held stronger birth control conspiracy beliefs than did women, and men's contraceptive safety conspiracy beliefs were associated with not using birth control," the study said. "In contrast, women who reported stronger conspiracy beliefs were no more or less likely to be using birth control than other women." However, women who used birth control and reported stronger agreement with conspiracy theories related to birth control were less likely to use provider-based methods, such as hormonal methods or sterilization. The study is based on a telephone survey of African Americans aged 15-44 years in the United States.

Waiting Lists for AIDS Drugs

A special presidential initiative that offered \$20 million in one-time funding to provide HIV/AIDS medications is slated to expire this month, leaving more than 1,400 individuals on waiting lists for the medication, according to an analysis from the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors. With the influx of these patients, waiting lists for HIV/AIDS drugs in nine states are expected to climb to more than 1,922 people, the group reported. Several more state AIDS drug assistance programs are also implementing cost-containment strategies that could continue or increase in 2006, the group said.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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