

Thursday, 08 February 2007

Human Development

Who says?:

**A brief essay examining my personal stance on
wrongful birth lawsuits and prenatal testing of genetic malformations**

Nowadays abortion doesn't simply revolve around the issue of terminating a life. More complexities involving results of prenatal detection of genetic abnormalities are considered as possible factors for differentiating the legality of abortion. Personally, I think that abortion should be offered to parents as a possibility at any point of the prenatal period provided genetic defects are found. With this viewpoint, I inadvertently open up the debate regarding the criteria for a 'genetic defect.' On that particular sub-issue, I take an incredibly liberal stance by saying that the decision should be left to the parents of the unborn child, with doctorial consultation (if requested).

These beliefs stem from my thoughts that parents who are unwilling to take care of a child with disabilities may treat him or her poorly. Also, with severely debilitating conditions, who will take care of the child if/when the parents and family cannot? Though I would like to think (as would parents and future parents) that people will unconditionally love their children, such is not always the case (Weil, 2006).

Understandably, if malpractice lawsuits based on "improper prenatal care" become more common place, doctors will start requiring more prenatal testing for every pregnant woman (Weil, 2006). With that requirement comes a variety of consequences, ranging from increased costs to the potential for a bias toward termination of "disabled" fetuses (Weil, 2006). First, prenatal testing, such as amniocentesis and CVS are not cheap, with prices for the former extending up to \$2000 USD (Younce, 2005). Doctors may need to lower the costs of such operations, have the parents waive the right to file charges if tests are denied, or insurance companies may have to cover the costs. Second, by informing parents of possible genetic defects, doctors may inadvertently bias the parents into aborting the fetus (Weil, 2006). This bias could result in fewer births of disabled children and therefore, the possibility of greater social stigma on the child and his or her family (Gross & Miller, 2006).

To counteract that stigma, I believe that genetic counselors should be bound (though not by law, but rather by a code of ethics) to present both the pros and cons of raising a child with a disability. If parents do not understand the impact of raising such a child, they cannot make (nor should they be expected to make) the vastly important decision of either terminating the pregnancy or giving birth to the child. I believe that while genetic counselors should feel obligated, by their Hippocratic Oath, to inform the parents of any and all information regarding the negative **and** positive aspects of their unborn disabled child's life. Though I think they should feel that responsibility by being adjunct to obstetricians in the medical field, I do not believe they should be held legally accountable, as the decision ultimately belongs to the parents. A post-abortion 'change of heart' is not the legal responsibility of the genetic counselor, in my opinion.

The still hotly-contested issue of abortion now not only involves morality and freedom of choice, but also scientific findings, unintentionally biases, and even legal responsibility. With this many complicated facets, abortion will undoubtedly remain a highly controversial topic for years, and possibly decades to come.

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