Do Women Sign Away Rights?

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a Baltimore medical school faculty and a practicing Ob-Gyn told this writer a consent form really makes very little difference.

"Because the sterilization form is not full of explanations should not alarm people," he said. "The consent form just doesn't mean that much. What counts is the relationship between the doctor and the patient.

"If I don't respond to a patient and attempt to make her see every difficulty she could face, I'm just not doing my job," he said.

Another Physician's View

Another Ob-Gyn physician had this answer to charges of uninformed consent.

"It's not uncommon for a surgeon to describe an operation as going down into the trenches. Make one mistake and there is no coming back. That's the end of their career!

"Charges that doctors operate just for the sake of operating, as these allegations of sterilization suggest, just don't fit into the picture. No doctor would take that kind of risk," he concluded.

Medical experts interviewed agreed that the rate of sterilization in both male and female is rising at a fast pace not only in the city but in the nation. As many as 2,000 sterilizations are estimated being performed annually in Baltimore now. This figure would concur with nationwide estimates of 30,000 sterilizations being done, which represents a 10-fold increase over the number of sterilizations reported 10 years ago.

With new improved operating techniques being offered at reduced prices, a man or woman can be sterilized with no hospital stay required.

Often the operations — vasectomy for men and tubal ligation for women — take less than four hours. This, doctors are quick to point out, was impossible 10 years ago.

Additionally, the actual relationship between a patient and hospital is undergoing substantial changes.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) adopted this year a 'Hospital Patients Bill of Rights.' And in December, 1972, the first malpractice suit against a doctor on the basis of his failing to provide informed consent was upheld by the California Supreme Court.

12-Point National Policy

The bill of rights is a 12-point national policy for hospital patients adopted by the AHA board of trustees following three years of research of health problems among the poor. It calls for a clear responsibility for patient care from not only the physician, but the hospital itself. Hospital activities "must be conducted with an overriding concern for the patient and, above all, the recognition of his dignity as a human being."

The California High Court's ruling was that state's first on informed consent and the most dramatic thus far in the nation. The patient who brought suit claimed he had suffered a complication he had not been warned about as a result of an operation. In his case, he had undergone a duodenal ulcer operation in which there is a five per cent risk factor of losing a spleen.

The complication arose and the man went to court!

The major complaints being raised against sterilization by some of its Baltimore critics are:

— Patients are not being adequately informed as to the permanence of the operation and the chance they may regret it later in their life.

— Women who give birth to their third or fourth child by Caesarean section are being urged to get sterilized because of increased health risks they might face as a result of another pregnancy.

— Patients are not fully aware the death risk from using anesthesia is one death per 2,000 patients while the death risk for contraceptives which do not involve an operation are approximately one person in 150,000-200,000 patients.

The concern for the sterilization's permanent effect stems from the fact many persons from the age group of 18-25 years are requesting the operation as a solution to their fears of pregnancy. Some family planning advocates point to the high divorce rate of persons married between these ages and suggest sterilization may be a cause of great regret if the person wants to have a child because of remarriage or death of an offspring.

PAGE TALK: Charlotte King, left, new House of Representatives page at the Capitol in Washington, got a few words of welcome and experience from Miriam Marty, Missouri, and Kim Tomb, Hawaii, on her first day on the job. She was appointed by Representative William Clay, (Dem., Mo.)
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