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THE PENIS PAGE

FACTS AND PHALLUSES OF
AMERICA'S FAVORITE ORGAN

By Sharon Chester-Taxin

David Llewellyn became involved in "penile law" when he brought a lawsuit for wrongful circumcision.

William Stowell lay flat on his back, naked from the waist down. He had been strapped to a board, his arms and legs stretched apart. A man hovered over the infant, took hold of Stowell's penis, lifted part of its glans and sliced the piece off. Stowell must have been in excruciating pain; he'd been given no anesthetic. His heart rate surged and his cortisol level rose to such a degree it equaled that of someone being tortured.

Now, 19 years later, Stowell wants the man who did this to pay.

Is this a scene from an NC-17 horror flick? Would you be surprised to find out that procedures like this occur regularly in countless hospitals and homes throughout the United States? They're called circumcisions.

"Oh," you might be saying now. "Then what's the big deal?" Well, to a growing number of men (and women) it *is* a big deal. It certainly is to Stowell, who, upon turning 18 in December of last year, filed a lawsuit in New York for damages in excess of $75,000 against Frank P. Cariello, the obstetrician who circumcised him, and against Good Samaritan Hospital in West Islip, New York, where the procedure took place. Stowell is not suing for medical malpractice. No one claims that the physician negligently performed the circumcision. The suit is for battery, defined as an "offensive touching" under the law, for performing the procedure that was not medically necessary, and for fraud, claiming that the surgery was done without proper consent. Stowell's mother signed the consent form, but, she says she did so while under the influence of Demerol and other drugs administered to help ease her pain after delivering her son by Caesarian section.

"For someone with a foreskin, the advantages are self-evident," says Stowell's attorney, David Llewellyn, noting that the foreskin provides its owner with vital sensory, protective, and sexual functions throughout his life. Llewellyn, an attorney from Conyers, Georgia, who's been practicing law for 21 years, is also an anti-circumcision advocate. He says that a circumcision is by no means a risk-free procedure. (Some of the dangers include excessive bleeding, infection, scarring, curvature of the penis, impotence, and even death.) Llewellyn became involved in "penile" law in 1995, when he brought a lawsuit against a doctor in Alabama for

wrongful circumcision. (This landed his client a jury verdict and a record $65,000 in damages.) In that case the mother told the doctor not to circumcise her son, but the physician went ahead with the procedure anyway. Llewellyn is currently handling 21 circumcision cases throughout the United States.

"[Stowell's lawsuit] is the first time a young man upon turning 18 has decided to sue his circumciser," remarks Llewellyn. "This landmark case raises the questions of whether a parent can give consent at all for a surgery that is merely cosmetic in nature, and whether a physician should be permitted to perform a nontherapeutic operation on a minor."

In 1985 nurse Marilyn Milos founded the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers, an organization that provides education and information about circumcision. "We're trying to educate people in a foreskin-phobic society about normal penile anatomy," says Milos. "If the foreskin is removed, what is left of the head of the glans is not as sensitive, and only responds to deep pressure stimulation."

"The excuse for circumcision has always been consistent with the disease of the time," says attorney J. Steven Svoboda, executive director of Attorneys for the Rights of the Child, a California-based legal-support center for matters relating to circumcision and other human-rights issues.

Throughout history, claims have been made that circumcision can aid in hygiene, prevent certain form of cancer, ever curb masturbation. But none of this has ever been medically proved, and in 1999 the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that "potential medical benefits of newborn-male circumcision are not sufficient to recommend routine neonatal circumcision."

So why does this procedure still take place?

"People with vested interests don't want to admit to themselves that they've been doing something bad for so many years," says Svoboda, who hopes that a victory in the Stowell case might bring a class-action suit against the hospital in the near future.

Says Llewellyn, "I would like to see the day arrive when hospitals no longer do routine circumcisions and little boys are left alone to develop the way nature intended."

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