

Module 3 - slp biotechnology and reproductive rights

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Abortion is one of the most widely debated issues in the medical world as it encompasses several moral and ethical considerations. As abortion is now being permitted under specific circumstances in many countries via the implementation of the Abortion Act, it is now being widely practiced in several countries across the world (Hewson, 2001; Giubilini & Minerva, 2012). The Act, however, does not grant the right to a woman or her partner the right to end a pregnancy merely because they do not want it; rather it gives the doctors power to terminate a pregnancy on medical grounds when the pregnancy will certainly cause grave mental and physical health problems to the mother or when the child will suffer from similar consequences (Greenwood, 2001). The main ethical considerations taken into account by physicians before performing an abortion is the well-being of the mother as well as the child. If the continuation of the pregnancy possesses increased physical as well as mental risk to the mother which is also confirmed through concrete medical diagnosis physicians would consider abortion as a viable option (Hewson, 2001; Trupin, 2012). There are several maternal illnesses that when diagnosed during pregnancy can affect the health of the mother if the pregnancy is carried to term. Malignant diseases such as cancer could pose a significant health risk to both the mother and the developing fetus (Trupin, 2012). In the Abortion Act of many countries such conditions are deemed to be ethical for performing an abortion. Conditions such as untreated eclampsia might give rise to significant health risks to both the mother and the child. In such cases a late abortion could be considered by the treating physicians. The environmental conditions of the woman and her family will also be considered by physicians

before making a decision. Apart from maternal factors congenital abnormalities of the child is also often considered for performing abortions. When such anomalies are detected during routine prenatal tests a decision on whether to perform an abortion could be made based on the religious and personal views of the parents (Hewson, 2001; Trupin, 2012). Studies estimate that about 3-5% of all newborns have some form of birth defects and most of which can be detected during prenatal testing. These include chromosomal or genetic disorders, developmental problems due to fetal or maternal infections, and drug effects that could be to the growth of the child (Trupin, 2012). More recently people from the medical and legal fraternity are emphasizing the need to permit after-birth abortions in cases when deformities of the child are detected only after birth. However, in some cases such birth defects of the child might remain undetected during pregnancy. This also includes the more common anomalies such as the Down's syndrome. Other conditions include prenatal asphyxia that could occur during delivery and cause serious damage to the brain of the fetus resulting in mental and physical impairments. Certain genetic mutations that occur in healthy gametes of the child's parents can result in certain syndromes in the child an example of which is Treacher-Collins syndrome (TCS). TCS causes facial deformity and serious respiratory problems in the child that could be life-threatening. In such cases parents might opt for an abortion if their circumstances do not allow for them to provide optimum care to such children. Physicians around the world have expressed that euthanasia in infants can be legalized in cases where there is grave danger to the life of the child. Parents will have to provide undivided attention and care to such

children which in many cases might not be possible resulting in unbearable consequences to the child. Despite the several ethical concerns related to the newborn infant being a potential individual, doctors prefer to consider the newborn to a fetus as they are in a state where they are not able to attribute a reason for their existence (Giubilini & Minerva, 2012).

Thus physicians have moral and ethical obligation to protect the life of both the mother and the child when considering abortions. Terminating a pregnancy without any medical issues or other justifiable personal reasons is deemed to be illegal.

Reference

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