

Barbara Kay: What is it about informed consent that frightens abortion advocates?

Thursday October 4th, 2012

I think we're going about this abortion debate the wrong way. We all know when life begins in the DNA sense: It begins at conception. The only people who have a bulletproof logical position on abortion are those for whom it is never ever permissible, because it is murder at any stage of gestation.

But that's not most of us. Most of us believe abortion is admissible under certain conditions. But very few of us believe abortion should be permissible at any time before actual delivery of a live baby.

The honest amongst us do not call the fetus a wad of tissue. We know that even an embryonic baby is still a human being- in- waiting. Now we have to convince ourselves that it is okay to kill this homunculus before it gets to a stage where its resemblance to us begins to gnaw too painfully at our conscience to go through with the killing.

Everyone has a different reason for killing her unwanted fetus. Reminding them of when life begins is not going to change their minds, even those who are killing them for gender reasons.

I think we need another approach. We should not be looking at regulations over women's bodies, but at regulations over their minds. By that I mean we should consider imposing a set of regulations to ensure that when abortions take place, they are occurring in the light of informed consent. And we need an abortion registry to gather data. Almost everyone in this abortion debate is ridiculously under- informed.

At the moment, women are hardly informed of anything about abortion before they give consent. As I have written previously, more than one previous induced abortion (IA) is a well- known risk for a premature birth in a future pregnancy. This is not a hypothesis. It is settled science. Premature birth is associated with a host of potential physical and mental deficits, the most dreaded being Cerebral Palsy. It would be interesting to have research done on all the cases of Cerebral Palsy in Canada to find out how many of them are linked to more than one previous abortion.

Risk of death [also increases](#) with each abortion. A 2012 [Danish study](#) (Priscilla Coleman, Bowling Green University) found that "Increased risks of death were 45%, 114% and 191% for 1, 2 and 3 abortions, respectively, compared to no abortions after controlling for other reproductive outcomes and last pregnancy age...". The subjects for this study were Danish women. Since 1973 Denmark has had a national induced abortion registry. So it was not necessary to actually interview women in order to ascertain their IA history.

Finland too has a national abortion registry. Doctors are required by law to record all IAs. In 1997 Dr. Milka Gissler and his colleagues [compared the total death risk](#) in the 12 months "after the end of pregnancy." Women who gave birth after a normal gestation had the lowest total death risk, even lower than women who had *not* been pregnant within the last twelve months. Women with IAs had 3.5 times the total death risk in the following twelve months compared to women who delivered. Women with IAs also had 6.5 times the risk of suicide in the year after their abortion.

New York state has an IA registry. A 1989 [study there](#) reported that New York women with prior IAs have a 90% higher relative risk of breast cancer under age 40 as compared to New York women with no prior IAs.

Shouldn't all women seeking abortions know all this stuff? I once sent a sleuth into three different abortion clinics posing as a woman who was having difficulty making up her mind about an abortion. She asked for a consultation in each clinic. Each time she was urged to simply fill out the forms and book the abortion for the next day. She had to press hard to get a consultation with a doctor. In each case she specifically asked the doctor if there were any side effects or downside to abortion. Each time the doctor emphatically assured her there was no downside or risks to a future pregnancy, even after multiple abortions. They lied, and they could lie, because there are no regulations around informed consent.

That's the route we should be going. Informed consent, a consultation in which all the information is discussed, including a stern discussion on gender- based abortion if necessary, a 24-48 hour reflection period, and an offer to view an ultrasound. Is that such a terrible affront to women? I don't think so. It could in fact save them from a great deal of anguish later on. And if it saves a few babies from being killed, is that so terrible either?

bkay@videotron.ca

National Post

Barbara Kay - Columnist