

## Medical Research and Clinical Practice - 1995

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Bless the Eternal, O my soul, and forget not all the Eternal's benefits; ...who healeth all thy diseases. (Psalms 103:2-3)

### Issue

Recent advances in medical research and clinical practice have stimulated controversies about alternative medicine, fetal tissue, invasive surgery including bone marrow extraction and organ transplant, insurance coverage and length of hospitalization, and research on women's health. Concerns are also addressed regarding bioethics and the sanctity of life.

### Background

Throughout the years Women of Reform Judaism has passed resolutions on issues of health. The field of medicine and medically related research is one of the most rapidly advancing areas of science. Since women comprise more than half of the population, it is understandable that they have not only a strong interest in knowledge of medical information pertaining especially to them but also to general facts whether applied to women, men or children.

Today, research is including a large number of efforts in which final results may not yet be sharply definitive. Sometimes early results do not sustain long-term ones. This is true not only in usual medical practice but also in alternative medicine. The latter falls outside of mainstream medical teaching and care which is currently considered the standard in the United States and many other countries. The skills and knowledge to practice alternative methodologies are most often and in some cases exclusively performed or taught outside of accredited medical colleges and are not in use in medical practice, hospitals or clinics, nor are they accepted for insurance coverage. Alternative medicine includes macrobiotic and other diets, naturopathy, acupuncture and other treatments as adjuncts to or replacements for more usual medical practice. The rise of alternative medicine has seen some of the traditional institutions, including the National Institutes of Health of the United States, form divisions of alternative medicine.

The increased emphasis on bioethics is welcome. In Judaism, the belief in the sanctity of life and the importance of the family and enduring relationships are realities. The issue of the use of fetal tissue in research and treatment is not as recent as many in the public may believe. This research actually began in the 1920's. It has become controversial because of the pro-life and right-to-choose points of view.

Another issue is that of invasive surgery. Studies indicate that invasive techniques may be used more frequently in the United States than in a number of other countries. Reasons include not only advances in surgery but also that less invasive techniques may not be sufficiently studied, utilized nor insurance covered. However, there is one area of major exception and that is organ transplant and bone marrow extraction, invasive practices. These involve both donor and recipient with an ever increasing need to save lives or to improve greatly the quality of life. The need for living donors or organs from those whose own lives have ended is truly urgent.

A major need in state of the art and science of medicine is broader insurance coverage. Too often it is denied for advanced procedures. Increased hospitalization coverage for newborn infants and their mothers is also urgently needed for their added safety.

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Although research has focused on women's serious health problems, such as ovarian cancer, heart disease and the recently demonstrated genetic relationship to breast cancer in women of Central and Eastern European Jewish background, increased attention and funding are needed. Moreover, the inclusion of women as well as men in statistical and other studies of therapies is essential.

#### Resolution

The Women of Reform Judaism calls on its affiliates to:

- 1) Encourage the study of alternative medicine in medical schools and research facilities and its practice in hospitals and by physicians, when applicable, as adjuncts to conventional therapies.
- 2) Support continuing fetal tissue research and its use in life saving and life-enhancing procedures with regulations that prohibit the sale or purchase of fetal tissue and with procedural guidelines to effectively separate the scientific usage and the means by which fetal tissue is obtained.
- 3) Continue and advance further research for noninvasive procedures and for improved technologies to overcome various diseases or the malfunction of organs, and secure financial aid, if necessary, through government grants as well as private and corporate support.
- 4) Support research on and development and use of non-invasive procedures to terminate pregnancy.
- 5) Urge continued intense study and research on issues of women's health, including expedited research and clinical studies, with all necessary funding, into the implications of a genetic link between Jewish women of Central and Eastern European descent and increased vulnerability to breast cancer.
- 6) Strongly seek adjustments in insurance not only to cover advances on the frontiers of medicine but also to allow longer hospitalization for newborns and their mothers, including similar coverage in birth centers or in home deliveries.
- 7) Call for legislative protection against genetic and gender discrimination by life and health insurance companies.
- 8) Participate in bone-marrow testing campaigns and blood drives, and request every Sisterhood member to carry an organ donor card and to inform her family and others of her desire.
- 9) Congratulate the National Institutes of Health of the United States on having established a Committee on Alternative Medicine, urge the United States government to adequately finance it, and urge the National Institutes of Health to encourage similar local research committees where none exists.
- 10) Suggest that non-U.S. affiliates review this resolution to take any actions that may seem necessary and appropriate in their countries.