Is Gender Selection An Appropriate Use of Medical Resources?

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Gender selection by PGD is an appropriate use of medical resources. Children borne through PGD for gender determination would be welcome and would come into a couple's life at a planned, opportune time. If the practice were made more available through insurance coverage, the size and makeup of families could become a matter of choice rather than chance for couples favoring this approach.

KEY WORDS: PGD; gender determination; medical resources.

Throughout history, people have attempted to control the sex of their progeny. Indeed, these attempts undoubtedly predate written history, stretching back through time to the earliest realization that sexual activity and childbirth have a cause-and-effect relationship. Recorded methods are various, and sometimes amusing, in comparison to contemporary techniques used to increase the odds of one sex over the other in conception. The current debate over gender selection is over the ability to control the sex of one's offspring through preimplantation embryo biopsy and chromosome testing (PGT). And, aside from the moral and ethical questions it raises, whether use of PGT for this specific purpose is an appropriate use of medical resources. We believe this procedure should remain within the province of personal choice, just as does any voluntary medical procedure.

In consideration of whether we as a society should allow our health care resources to be used for this practice, the question that comes to mind is who, specifically, is asking? Concerns over the fate of dollars spent on health care in this country should fall into two categories: the careproviders and the careseekers,

who naturally occupy opposite ends of the "Concern" issue. In between these groups are insurance companies and the alphabet soup of HMOs, PPOs and their ilk, whose function is to keep out of pocket costs to careseekers (consumers) low, and profits to shareholders of these organizations high. Nothing disreputable in this arrangement, but the question of "who's asking?" about the appropriateness of spending healthcare dollars on gender selection remains. As it is, there are members of society who desire access to this service, and there are specialists able to provide it. The real question therefore should not be about the appropriateness, per se, but whether gender selection should be covered by health insurance.

The United States has for over 200 years led the world in the ability of its citizens to exercise personal freedom of judgment. This constitutionally guaranteed right has allowed unprecedented advances in science, technology, politics, law, creative thinking, and lifestyle. America has flourished as a consequence to this mentality, and excessive behaviors are, for the most part, controlled by a singular principle summarized by the pithy expression, "the right to swing my fist ends where your nose begins." When compared to the billions spent annually on nutritional supplements, homeopathic nostrums, surgical body sculpturing and innumerable diet regimes, the money spent on PGT would be a singular blip on

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the radar screen. Moreover, the effect of PGT might even *reduce* (taxpayer-borne) government spending on health and human services over the long run.

Consider that millions of couples in this country have more children in their households than they have the resources to afford. This situation is partly due to repeated childbearing in an attempt to obtain a certain number of children of a certain sex. The consequences of this practice are evident in overcrowded schools, subsidized healthcare, and public assistance programs bending under the weight of our many needy citizens, all of the attendant costs falling to society at large. If gender determination through PGT were made generally available, the size and makeup of families could become a matter of choice rather than chance for couples favoring this approach.

PGT for gender selection may therefore represent a rational and economical alternative to the status quo.

The moral and ethical issues surrounding PGT for gender determination, as well as religious and cultural issues, are addressed in other papers appearing in this issue. Children born through PGT for gender determination would be wanted and welcome in the families they are born into. Even the timing of the pregnancy could be determined reducing the stress and consequences of an unwanted birth at an unwanted time in the lives of many young families whose career planning may be seriously, perhaps irreparably, disrupted by this circumstance.

The time for debate on the topic of PGT for gender determination has arrived, as the technology is in current usage for this purpose in the United States. Exercising the right to choose family planning and/or balancing would, we believe, have a positive effect on the quality of life of the parents and the children delivered unto them.