

June 21, 2007

Ob/Gyn Society Warns that Early Gender Tests May be Misused for Sex Selective Abortion

Using mail-in kits available online, Canadian women can determine the sex of their unborn child just weeks into pregnancy. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) today is warning that these tests may be used unethically for the purpose of selective abortion based on gender.

“The SOGC remains firmly against the practice of sex selection through selective abortion,” said Dr. Don Davis, President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. “These new technologies are finding their way to Canadian women and are opening the door to a number of ethical questions.”

Currently, mail-order gender testing kits are available for purchase online. The kits require a pregnant woman to collect a small blood sample, which is then tested for the baby’s gender by analyzing fetal DNA in her blood stream. Available online for a few hundred dollars, the tests claim to be able to determine a child’s gender as early as five or six weeks after conception. The tests themselves are non-invasive and present no health risk to the child, requiring only a blood sample from the mother.

The SOGC’s official policy statement on gender selection condemns medical techniques used for the purpose of sex selection as discriminatory.

“Such measures designed to support societal preferences for male children — whether by selective implantation of embryos, selective abortion of healthy fetuses, after amniocentesis or infanticide — can reinforce discriminatory attitudes towards women and female children,” the statement reads. “Any similar attempt to favour birth of female children would be discriminatory against males.”

“Whenever technology such as this becomes available outside of the framework of our healthcare system, we need to look at this as a society and address some of these ethical questions,” said Dr. Davis. “It’s normal for parents to hope for a boy or to hope for a girl, but I think almost all Canadians would agree that using abortion for gender selection cannot ethically be condoned in this country.”

For more information, or to schedule interviews on this or other topics related to women's health, members of the media are invited to contact:

Lisa Robertson
(613) 739-7032

Susan Wright
(613) 730-2020

About Dr. Don Davis

Dr. Don Davis is the 63rd President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), serving for the term of 2006-2007. Dr. Davis' tenure as SOGC President will end on Monday, June 25th, 2007, when the society welcomes its 64th President Dr. Guylaine Lefebvre. Dr. Davis is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Calgary. He is also a practicing obstetrician/gynaecologist in his hometown Medicine Hat, where he has been providing care at Medicine Hat's Medical Arts Centre and the Medicine Hat Regional Hospital since 1978.

About the SOGC

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) is one of Canada's oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society's mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, outreach and education. The SOGC represents obstetricians/gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals working in the field of sexual reproductive health. For more information, visit www.sogc.org.