

FIGO Human Rights and Women's Health Case 8

Repeatedly requesting sterilization

T.M., a 29-year-old mother of two children, ages 7 and 5, requests that a tubal ligation procedure be performed at the time of her third cesarean delivery. She and her husband want no more children and she particularly wishes to avoid having to undergo a fourth cesarean operation. When her second child was delivered, she requested a tubal ligation, but her request was refused on the grounds that she was too young to be sterilized.

The doctor again refuses to perform the tubal ligation procedure, saying, "I don't do it before the woman has reached the age of 30 years. You are too young and at this age some couples change their mind about having more children, and come back to ask me to have the sterilization reversed." Although the couple insists that they are sure of their decision and wish to proceed, the doctor replies, "Come back when you are 32 or 33 and I will definitely do the sterilization for you."

Three months after the cesarean delivery, T.M. travels 1000 kilometers to consult another gynecologist, who agrees to perform the tubal ligation. However, because T.M. has already had three major abdominal operations, the doctor advises that she will require a minilaparotomy under general anesthesia. The couple feels they have no option but to agree. They begin saving money and preparing their family and employers for T.M.'s anticipated convalescent period far away from home.

Questions for discussion

1. What are the medical issues of this case? Specifically:
 - a. What are the risks and benefits of sterilization at the time of cesarean delivery?
 - b. What issues need to be discussed with T.M. to obtain full informed consent for sterilization?
2. Using the Integrating Human Rights and Health Checklist, identify those that were infringed in this case.
3. What are the possible social consequences of this denial of sterilization?
4. What are the laws/policies/practices regarding family planning advice in your medical facility?
5. How would you improve the clinic's standard of contraceptive care to follow international guidelines?

