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## Intactivists remember Conte, try to deliver petitions to AAP

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Attendees at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics, left, pass by activists from Intact America, Boodstained Men and Their Friends, and Bay Area Intactivists outside Moscone Center during a protest October 22. Photo: Rick Gerharter

Intact America, a group that advocates for the end of circumcision for male infants, held a news conference outside the meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics in San Francisco, where it had tried to present a petition but was rebuffed ahead of the meeting.

The group also remembered longtime intactivist Jonathon Conte, a gay San Francisco man who killed himself in May.

As the October 22 rally got underway, some passersby stopped to talk to protesters and read their handouts, though most people entering Moscone Center for the conference avoided looking at the demonstrators. Rally organizers had hoped to deliver a petition with 10,000 signatures to the AAP. The protest was organized when reps from AAP refused to meet with Intact America, the organization behind the petition.

According to Intact America, in the past year researchers and experts have published articles and studies that contradict the 2012 AAP statement that "the benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks."

Conte was remembered by the small group of about 25 protesters, who gathered to speak out against forced and medically recommended circumcisions.

San Francisco resident Lloyd Schofield, a close friend of Conte's, spoke at the rally. Schofield said that Conte had referred to his circumcision, which happened during his infancy, as "forced genital mutilation."

"Jonathon lost his job a week after his opposition to human genital mutilation was documented in the San Francisco Chronicle," Schofield said as he fought back tears. "He then devoted himself full time to speaking out, so that others would not have to endure the physical and psychological pain that he did. Eventually the lies, myths, and denial perpetrated by those at the AAP who practice, promote and profit from genitally mutilating healthy children were too much to bear and he took his own life in May."

Niki Sawyers traveled from her home in Philadelphia to attend the rally. She said that she was a "regret mom," someone who had allowed doctors to circumcise her son.

"Circumcision doesn't just hurt the baby, it hurts the mother," she said. "It keeps on hurting. Most mothers I speak to would never have allowed it had they known the facts. Why are parents not being given the facts?"

According to a flier handed out by Intact America, foreskin is a natural part of the penis. Removing it removes a layer of protection which the penis needs and also reduces the pleasure of sexual sensation.

Georganne Chapin, executive director of Intact America, told the Bay Area Reporter that circumcisions were medically unnecessary.

"Children need to be protected from medically useless and potentially harmful surgery that will permanently alter their bodies," she said. "Nobody has the right to consent to a medically unnecessary procedure on behalf of another person who cannot, because of age, legally consent."

Chapin added that many doctors and hospitals profit from performing medically unnecessary procedures. She acknowledged that some religions, such as Judaism and Islam, require circumcisions to be performed.

"There is no place in legitimate medicine for physicians and other health care practitioners to be performing cultural rituals," she said. "Doubly so on babies and children who have no stated religious or spiritual beliefs."

Chapin pointed out that the AAP does not recommend circumcisions.

AAP Executive Director Dr. Karen Remley did not respond to the B.A.R.'s email requesting a comment.

Schofield said members of the pediatricians' group should speak out.

"I urge those ethical members of the AAP to speak up strongly against those within the organization who use terms like 'do no harm' and 'informed consent,'" Schofield said. "They hypocritically speak out against early childhood trauma while they themselves routinely inflict it."

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