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Circumcision protest brought to Florence

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Harry Guiremand of Bloodstained Men and Their Friends protests on the corner of West Palmetto Street and West Cherokee Avenue Thursday morning in Florence.

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FLORENCE, S.C. — Four men from different corners of the world protested circumcision on the corner of West Palmetto Street and West Cherokee Road on Thursday.

The protest is a part of Bloodstained Men and Their Friends' 18-day, 17-city tour of the Carolinas to raise awareness of what the protesters called the barbarity of the medical procedure that removes the foreskin from the male sex organ. Bloodstained Men was founded in 2012.

The protesters, Harry Guiremand of Hawaii, Simon Ten Kate of the Netherlands, Brett Johnson of Kansas City and David Atkinson of Boston, were scheduled to be in Florence from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday.

Guiremand, said he became involved with Bloodstained Men about four years ago. He said he was shocked when he realized he had undergone the procedure.

"I felt betrayed," Guiremand said Thursday morning. "I felt like I had been betrayed by my own people."

Guiremand wondered why no one protected him and decided that it was up to him to protect others.

Meanwhile, two years ago, Simon Ten Kate of the Netherlands got involved when he realized that many American men were being circumcised. His first protest was at the Super Bowl. In Europe, Ten Kate said, the practice of voluntary circumcision is not allowed at public hospitals.

"People don't know that Americans are still doing this," he said. "[Those of us that are not circumcised] we don't appreciate our intact bodies. It's just barbaric. It's a human rights issue. The boy is powerless to stop it."

Guiremand said one of the main drawbacks of circumcision is that men undergoing the procedure lose their sensitivity during sexual activity. Other drawbacks include a drying out of parts of the organ and potential damage to the boy's immunological responsiveness. Bloodstained Men lists over 16 functions that are damaged by circumcision.

For more information on those functions, visit foreskinfunctions.org.

However, according to the Mayo Clinic, the benefits of circumcision are that the male sex organ becomes easier to clean and the risk of getting certain diseases like penile cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and urinary tract infections are lowered.

According to Ten Kate this may have been one of the original motivators that pushed Americans to start the practice around 150 years ago. Back then, in the Victorian Age, people were more prudish and doctors did not like the thought of men or women enjoying sex. Over time, this notion developed into a notion that Christianity requires men to be circumcised.

Ten Kate said there was nothing requiring anyone but those of the Jewish faith to be circumcised.

However, the practice is still common among Christians in the United States, Oceania, South Korea, the Philippines, the Middle East and Africa. Some Middle Eastern Christians actually view the procedure as a rite of passage.

Guiremand and Ten Kate said they realized their protest may cause some to become angry.

Guiremand believes the anger of many men is misdirected from those who forced men to be circumcised to the protesters for bringing up the issue and reminding the men of what they had lost.

Ten Kate added that if people didn't like the group's protest, he welcomed them to celebrate the act of circumcision.

"Why aren't you proud of it?" Ten Kate asked. "If it's so good then you should be celebrating it."

Matthew Christian