



February 1, 2010

Andre Picard's January 28, 2010 column condemned the method of educating medical students on the female pelvic examination in Canada. He used, as his primary source of information, a survey from one clinic rather than consulting educational leaders in women's health on common practice.

Furthermore, a February 1, 2010 editorial in the Globe & Mail stated that 'Canada-wide guidelines appear to allow pelvic exams on unknowing patients'. In fact, in 2005, the Association of Professors of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada (APOG) and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) created a joint policy on the teaching of pelvic examination which states that 'The surgeon should inform the patient that she may be examined by a trainee at the beginning of the surgery.'

Mr. Picard's description - 'a group of medical students parades into the operating room and they perform gynaecological exams (unrelated to the surgery) without your knowledge' - is clearly in violation of this policy. To describe this, as Mr. Picard does, as "standard procedure" is simply false.

Students may be unaware that the patient has given consent for examination. It is the role of the surgeon to obtain that consent, not the student. APOG believes that no patient should undergo pelvic examination for educational purposes without her knowledge and consent.

We regret that the Globe and Mail did not consult us prior to publication of these articles. We believe that this has potential to seriously damage the trust that currently exists between patients and their gynaecologists. It is important that the Canadian public understands that educators in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and our trainees consider our ethical obligations to our patients of the utmost importance.

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