

ACOG

Committee on
Ethics

Committee Opinion



Number 297, August 2004

Nonmedical Use of Obstetric Ultrasonography

ABSTRACT: *The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has endorsed the "Prudent Use" statement from the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) discouraging the use of obstetric ultrasonography for nonmedical purposes (eg, solely to create keepsake photographs or videos). The ACOG Committee on Ethics provides reasons in addition to those offered by AIUM for discouraging this practice.*

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has endorsed the following statement from the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) discouraging the use of obstetric ultrasonography for nonmedical purposes (eg, solely to create keepsake photographs or videos) (1):

The AIUM advocates the responsible use of diagnostic ultrasound. The AIUM strongly discourages the non-medical use of ultrasound for psychosocial or entertainment purposes. The use of either two-dimensional (2D) or three-dimensional (3D) ultrasound to only view the fetus, obtain a picture of the fetus or determine the fetal gender without a medical indication is inappropriate and contrary to responsible medical practice. Although there are no confirmed biological effects on patients caused by exposures from present diagnostic ultrasound instruments, the possibility exists that such biological effects may be identified in the future. Thus ultrasound should be used in a prudent manner to provide medical benefit to the patient.

In addition to the concerns noted by AIUM, the ACOG Committee on Ethics believes that nonmedical use of ultrasonography should be discouraged for the following reasons:

- Nonmedical ultrasonography may falsely reassure women. Even though centers that perform nonmedical ultrasonography and create keepsake photographs and videos of the fetus may offer disclaimers about the limitations of their product, customers may interpret an aesthetically pleasing image or entertaining video as evidence of fetal health and appropriate development. Ultrasonography performed for psychosocial or entertainment purposes may be limited by the extent and duration of the examination, the training of those acquiring the images, and the quality control in place at the ultrasound facility. Women may incorrectly believe that the limited scan is, in fact, diagnostic.

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ISSN 1074-861X

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Nonmedical use of obstetric ultra-
sonography. ACOG Committee
Opinion No. 297. American College
of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.
Obstet Gynecol 2004;104:423-4.

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- Abnormalities may be detected in settings that are not prepared to discuss and provide follow-up for concerning findings. Without the ready availability of appropriate prenatal health care professionals, customers at sites for nonmedical ultrasonography may be left without necessary support, information, and follow-up for concerning findings. For example, customers may interpret a minor finding (eg, an echogenic intracardiac focus) as a major abnormality, resulting in unnecessary anxiety and concern. Conversely, in the event of concerning findings

(eg, oligohydramnios), women may not receive appropriate follow-up. Obstetric ultrasonography is most appropriately obtained as part of an integrated system for delivering prenatal care.

Reference

1. American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine. Prudent use. AIUM Official Statements. Laurel (MD): AIUM; 1999. Available at http://www.aium.org/provider/statements/_statementSelected.asp?statement=2. Retrieved May 19, 2004.