



Abortion Backers Can't Ignore New York Times Story That Babies Feel Pain

by **Laura Echevarria**

LifeNews.com Editor

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LifeNews.com Note: Laura Echevarria is a LifeNews.com opinion columnist. She is the former Director of Media Relations and a spokesperson for the National Right to Life Committee and has been a radio announcer, freelance writer active in local politics.

Sunday's New York Times contained an article that was out of the ordinary—at least for the New York Times.

"The First Ache" by Annie Murphy Paul was a balanced look at the issue of fetal pain.

Pioneering the field of fetal pain is Dr. Kanwaljeet (Sunny) Anand. Twenty-five years ago, Dr. Anand was a resident in the neonatal intensive care unit at John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England. Many of his patients were preterm infants in need of surgery and Dr. Anand soon discovered that infants returning from surgery were in significant distress and he had to spend considerable time stabilizing them.

Getting permission to observe the surgeries, Dr. Anand realized that the problem was likely that these tiny children were given a paralytic to hold them still during surgery but no anesthesia. The assumption was that their nervous system was too immature to register pain. Dr. Anand thought the opposite was true.

Working on that theory, Dr. Anand was able to show through clinical trials that preterm infants did indeed perceive pain and that babies who were operated on without anesthesia had a "massive stress response." Babies who were anesthetized during surgery were more stable afterwards and Dr. Anand showed that anesthesia during surgery decreased the mortality rate of these children from 25 percent to 10 percent.

Today, it would be considered barbaric to perform surgery on a newborn or preterm infant without anesthesia.

Dr. Anand wanted to know more about the pain response in infants and how and when it developed. Because of his research he believes that unborn babies can perceive pain by 20 weeks, if not earlier.

Of course this has led abortion proponents to argue against fetal pain and that it's just another way for pro-lifers to confuse the average American about abortion on demand. They apparently believe that we'll be thrown back into the Dark Ages.

But it's abortion supporters and sympathizers who are living in the past.

In 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* was handed down, we knew very little about life in the womb.

Today, technology allows us to detect brain waves as early as six weeks, to see into the womb through ultrasound and, through fetal surgery, to correct disabling conditions that a hundred years ago would have condemned a child to an early death.

If all of an unborn child's major organ systems are in place within the first couple of months, what could be so shocking about the existence of a primitive pain system?

For an abortion supporter, fetal pain would undoubtedly tie an unborn child to the rest of humanity through a common

characteristic. No longer could that child be consigned to the dust heap through degrading and dehumanizing descriptions like “the products of conception.” Something that can feel pain is no longer a “thing.”

Scientific and medical acceptance of fetal pain would require, at a minimum, the use of some form of anesthesia in abortions beginning at eighteen weeks. Women would have to be informed that their unborn children likely feel pain beginning at around 20 weeks and maybe earlier.

And some women may change their minds about having an abortion.

All in all, society’s acceptance of fetal pain could be a harbinger of doom for the abortion establishment.

Annie Murphy Paul quotes Elizabeth Nash, a public-policy associate with the Guttmacher Institute, a special affiliate of Planned Parenthood, “By personifying the fetus, [pro-lifers are] trying to steer the woman’s decision away from abortion.”

Paul writes, “In their use of pain to make the fetus seem more fully human, anti-abortion forces draw on a deep tradition. Pain has long played a special role in how society determines who is like us or not like us (‘us’ being those with the power to make and enforce such distinctions.) The capacity to feel pain has often been put forth as proof of a common humanity. . . .Over time, the charmed circle of those considered to be alive to pain, and therefore fully human, has widened to include members of other religions and races, the poor, the criminal, the mentally ill—and, thanks to the work of Sunny Anand and others, the very young. Should the circle enlarge once more, to admit those not yet born?”

Yes.

It is long past time that our culture acknowledge what nature has always shown: that an unborn baby is a member not only of humanity but also of society.

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