

## Attitudes differ on exam permission

Medical students commonly perform pelvic examinations in the operating room when the patient is under anesthesia.

This educational practice poses no physical harm to the patient, and research shows that most women are willing to allow medical students to perform the examinations, but with the proviso that permission is asked for – and granted. Nevertheless, many OB/GYN departments do not regularly inform women when they will be undergoing pelvic examinations by medical students while under anesthesia.

Against this backdrop, researchers who looked at completion of an OB/GYN clerkship associated with a decline in the perceived importance of securing permission from patients before conducting pelvic examinations under anesthesia?

According to a Philadelphia-area study published today in the February issue of the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, researchers at the University of Michigan Health System believe the answer is YES.

"We found that medical students who have not yet done their OB/GYN clerkship place more value on securing consent than do medical students who have completed the OB/GYN clerkship," says author Dr. Peter Ubel, director, U-M Medical School's Program for Improving Health Care Decisions, and associate professor of internal medicine. "The OB/GYN clerkship seems to be the defining event in this erosion, as opposed to gradual erosion of the students' many clerkships or rotations."

The study looked at questionnaires that were distributed in 1995 to all 4,611 medical students at five Philadelphia area medical schools. Students were asked how important it would be for a patient to be told that a medical student is going to perform a pelvic examination under anesthesia. Researchers tested for associations between completion of an OB/GYN clerkship and attitudes toward pelvic examinations using linear regression to adjust for gender and total amount of clerkship experience.

"Something clearly happens during our OB/GYN clerkships that is associated with students placing less importance on consent for pelvic examinations under anesthesia," says Ubel, who was on the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Bioethics at the time the study was conducted.

The attitudes of two of the authors as medical students suggest that consent is either not routinely obtained for educational pelvic examinations performed by medical students in the operating room or, at best, somewhat murky.

"To our medical student experiences, we were unclear whether the patients we were asked to examine had given explicit consent to be examined. The study suggests that similar experiences are associated with a decline in the importance students place on seeking permission for such examinations," Ubel says.

At the U-M Health System, however, policy and practice are in unison, and patient consent is the norm.

## Coalition asks U.S. to withdraw from tobacco treaty talks

BY CLARE NULLIS  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

treaty which can be signed and ratified," said Terry Peacheck, of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Thailand, Saudi Arabia and other developing countries also complained that the U.S. delegation was using strong-arm tactics and financial threats to force through its will.

Representatives from at least 180 countries attending the talks have until Friday to agree on an accord in order for the 192-nation World Health Assembly to approve a deal at its annual meeting in May.

Officials decline to speculate on what would happen if no agreement is reached.

"The vast majority of countries want to introduce sweeping restrictions, including a total ban on tobacco advertising and requiring tobacco companies to put graphic images on their products – such as pictures of diseased lungs.

Most also want cigarette companies to stop marketing, cigarettes as "mild" and "light" and also want the protections against potential U.S. trade sanctions or retaliation if they try to impose restrictions on cigarette imports.

The United States – home to the world's biggest cigarette exporter, Philip Morris – has flatly rejected an advertising ban, saying it would violate international rules.

"At this critical juncture, the United States government is working methodically to weaken virtually every aspect of this treaty," John Saffron said. "We call on the U.S. government to observe the first rule of the Hippocratic Oath: Do No Harm."

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