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# Scandal at the Journal of the American Medical Association

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An undisclosed conflict of interest related to abortion is fueling controversy at the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Here is the lead from an article in today's edition of *The New York Times*: "Two of five authors of an article published in a medical journal on Wednesday saying that fetuses probably cannot feel pain before the 29th week of pregnancy did not tell the journal that they had abortion-related activities that might be seen as a conflict of interest, the journal's editor said Wednesday."

Specifically: "One author, Susan J. Lee, a medical student, is also a lawyer who for eight months from 1999 to 2000 worked in the legal department at NARAL, an abortion rights group. Another author, Dr. Eleanor A. Drey, performs abortions and is medical director of an abortion clinic."

Dr. Catherine D. DeAngelis, editor of the journal, claimed that she had been unaware of the authors' activities. Nevertheless, she defended the journal, asserting that outside experts had reviewed the article.

Amazingly, the two authors cited in the article claimed that the conflict of interest had not even occurred to them. The paper reported: "In interviews yesterday, Dr. Drey and Ms. Lee said they did not regard their work as a conflict of interest and so it had not occurred to them to report it to the journal editors."

In other words, we are supposed to believe that an article claiming that fetuses do not feel pain before the 29th week of pregnancy have no hidden agenda, even though one of the authors runs an abortion clinic and another is a former lawyer for NARAL? This goes beyond a run-of-the-mill credibility crisis. After all, this is the official journal published by the American Medical Association.

The study, published this week in JAMA, is itself an exercise in the perverse reframing of an issue. Rather than accepting the grave moral question of abortion, the authors intend to argue that, since the fetus supposedly does not feel pain, we should not be concerned about administering anesthesia as the fetus is killed. Such is the perverse logic of the Culture of Death. Just look at comments from Dr. Drey published in Tuesday's edition of *The New York Times*: *Dr. Eleanor A. Drey, one of Dr. Rosen's co-authors, said that as an obstetrician who sometimes performs abortions, she would find it troubling to be compelled to bring up the subject of fetal pain with her patients. "I would be forced to drag them through potentially a lot of misinformation," she said. "Our systematic review has shown it's extremely unlikely that pain exists at a point when abortions are done. I'm going to have to talk about something I know will cause the patient distress, something that by our best assessment of the scientific data is not relevant."*

LINKS PAINFUL TO READ: "Fetal Pain: A Systematic Multidisciplinary Review of the Evidence," Susan J. Lee, JD; Henry J. Peter Ralston, MD; Eleanor A. Drey, MD, EdM; John Colin Partridge, MD, MPH; Mark A. Rosen, MD, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 294:8, August 24/31, 2005, pp. 947-954. "Study Authors Didn't Report Abortion Ties," *The New York Times*, Friday, August 26, 2005; "Report Finds Fetuses Feel Pain Later Than Thought," *The New York Times*, Tuesday, August 23, 2005; "Fetal-Pain Study Omits an Abortion-Rights Link," *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, Wednesday, August 24, 2005.

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