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Abortion and Reproductive Rights: A Comprehensive Guide to Medicine, Ethics, and the Law. J. Douglas Butler, Inc..

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Even before the 1973 United States Supreme Court decision, <cite>Roe v. Wade</cite>, recognizing women's constitutional right to abortion based on the right to privacy clause, the issue of abortion commanded attention. Afterwards, abortion arguably became the most controversial issue of the past three decades. Because of the ethical, legal, medical, political, sociological, psychological, and economic elements of the issue, interest in both the practice of and access to abortion has crossed all disciplines, all social classes, and all political ideologies. This wide-spread interest has created a need for sources that provide a multi-discipline approach to the study of abortion. This CD-ROM goes a long way toward meeting those needs. <p> Dr. Butler states that the purpose of the CD-ROM is to provide "the most exhaustive and unbiased collection of information available today on reproductive rights." He delivers on the promise. Contributors range from Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul to former president Ronald Reagan to legal scholar Laurence Tribe to NARAL (The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League) to feminist Susan Faludi. Through a multimedia format that includes audio, video, graphics, and detailed charts, the user is able to follow the development of both normal and abnormal fetuses, hear the full text of <cite>Roe v. Wade</cite>, and understand complex medical procedures that are often unclear to lay people. Articles included from all areas contribute a much-needed resource for greater knowledge on this complex, controversial issue. <p> The CD-ROM is divided into three broad areas: Medicine, Ethics, and the Law. This is not to say, however, that the user should limit herself to a single section. As a political scientist, I found valuable information in all three sections. For example, in addition to sections from the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institute of Health, and Medical Journals, the Medical section includes articles from the Alan Guttmacher Institute and the Population Council. Each individual section provides a wealth of inter-disciplinary information. Among the topics one finds in the section from the Centers for Disease Control are articles on restricting Medicaid funds, different means of performing abortions, fees for abortions, illegal abortions, and effects of smoking and drinking during and after pregnancy. Additionally, the information found within each article is often of use to multiple disciplines. For instance, in <cite>Restricting Medicaid Funds for Abortions: Projections of Excess Mortality for Women of Childbearing Age</cite>, Diana B. Pettiti and Willard Cates, Jr., identify three ways that restricting public fund for abortions will result in higher mortality rates for women of childbearing age. In <cite>Impact of Vacuum Aspiration Abortion on Future Childbearing</cite>, Carol J. Rowland Hague and Willard Cates, Jr., revealed that women whose first pregnancy ends in induced abortion have "no greater risk of bearing low-weight babies, delivering prematurely, or suffering spontaneous abortions in subsequent pregnancies" than do women who carry a first pregnancy to term. <p> The section on Ethics is less comprehensive but still valuable. It is divided into three sections: Hastings Center, United States Congress, and Books and Articles. Within the Hastings Center Report, the user finds articles on ethical questions ranging from genetic diagnosis of human embryos and abortions used as a means of sex-selection, to the use of frozen embryos, and the issue of privacy. As might be expected, the authors in this section generally take decided stands on the issues. In <cite>Fatal Knowledge? Parental Diagnosis and Sex Selection</cite>, Dorothy C. Wertz and John C. Fletcher declare that "The medical profession has a responsibility to abandon its posture of ethical neutrality and take a firm stand against sex selection." After he and his wife were personally involved with in vitro fertilization, Paul Lauritzen maintained in <cite>What Price Parenthood?</cite> that "there are some real dangers in pursuing [new] technologies" and that "individuals should resort to them only after much soul searching and that society should resist efforts to expand their use in ways that should make them available as something other than a reproductive process of last resort." The section on the United States Congress includes transcripts of hearings and information on abortion-related

bills, including those on partial-birth abortions and clinic access. <p> The Books and Articles area of this section was particularly useful, offering former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's report on the health effects of abortion, an article on the oppressive use of Black and Jewish women in surrogacy, and a thought-provoking essay by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, titled "Is It Possible to Be Pro-Life and Pro-Choice?, in which the authors acknowledge the legitimacy of asking whether legislators have the right to tell women what to do with their bodies on the one hand, while pointing out that "all of us think it proper that there be prohibitions against, and penalties for, murder on the other hand." <p> The final section on Law, like the section on Medicine, provides a thorough handling of relevant issues. <cite>Roe v. Wades</cite> includes the full audio and printed text of that Supreme Court Decision. United States Supreme Court includes full texts of all landmark reproductive rights decisions, as well as some that are lesser known but also important. For example, it offers <cite>Buck v. Bell</cite>, a 1927 decision in which the Court upheld Virginia's right to forcefully sterilize women who were "afflicted with an hereditary form of insanity or imbecility, and <cite>Skinner v. Oklahoma</cite>, a 1942 decision in which the Court refused to allow Oklahoma to forcefully sterilize males who were identified as "habitual criminals." All cases are complete with footnotes, and Dr. Butler provides a bonus by hyper-linking a number of terms. For instance, in Joseph W. Dellapenna's article, "The History of Abortion, Technology, Morality, and the Law," hyper-links are provided to <cite>Roe v. Wade</cite>, <cite>Doe v. Bolton</cite>, lack of agreement among physicians on reproductive issues, and quinine (a folk-remedy for unwanted pregnancy). Each footnote includes citations of other relevant court cases. Other sections included in Law are: Law Reviews, Right to Life, Americans United for Life, American Civil Liberties Union, <cite>Amicus Curiae</cite> Briefs, Law Canada, and the usual Books and Articles. An additional section from NARAL includes a state-by-state analysis of abortion laws. For instance, we are told that even though 72,000 women in South Dakota are at risk for unwanted pregnancy, 98 percent of counties in South Dakota have no abortion provider. <p> This CD-ROM has many strengths. I believe that its foremost strengths are its comprehensive nature and its objectivity. It would take hundreds of books and articles to provide the information included in this single source, which promotes the inclusion of 20,000 pages of first-rate scholarship, 500 graphs, 141 articles from the Centers for Disease Control, 5,000 hyper-links, and 136 law review articles. The objectivity provides a well-balanced examination of abortion and reproductive rights. Overall, it is easy to use, providing both a printed user's guide and on-line instruction. The program allows the user to print an article in whole or in part, bookmark an article, annotate an entry for individual purposes, and cut and paste to other programs. It also has an excellent search engine which provides for both basic and boolean searches. Entering the phrase "partial-birth abortions" produced approximately sixty-one separate entries, among them congressional hearings, court decisions, law review articles, and a history of abortion techniques. Most articles were then hyper-linked to others. <p> While Dr. Butler provides detailed instructions for first use of the CD-ROM, which is likely to be sufficient for institutional use, subsequent users have to reinstall the CD-ROM each time it is used. The program would be more user-friendly if there were an option for individual users to add it to the program menu. An additional weakness was that when clicking on an article in an individual section, it appeared behind the menu without the user knowing it. This meant that by trial and error the user must discover the necessity to minimize the menu after clicking on an article so that the menu is handy for the next examination. An additional weakness is derived from the comprehensiveness that gives the CD-ROM its strength. When the user searches for a particular topic, it is sometimes necessary to scroll through page after page of an article to find the desired information. There are also some typographical mistakes that might give English-as-a-second-language users some trouble, since spaces were left out between words in some articles, making them hard to understand. Additionally, the speaker talks too fast on some of the audio selections. <p> These weaknesses, however, are heavily outweighed by the strengths of the CD-ROM. I highly recommend it for use by scholars, those in the medical and legal professions, ethicists, both proponents of and opponents to abortion, and those who simply wish to know more about abortion and reproductive rights. <p>

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