

Pro-life Basics

As I was being prepped to have a polyp removed, the doctor asked if I'd like to have a NovaSure ablation [a surgical procedure using electromagnetic energy to destroy the uterine lining]. She said it would permanently relieve my heavy flow each month and that it was for women who don't plan on having any more children. I'm 49 years old and have three teens, so that sounded OK to me—except I wondered if this was “kosher” for a Catholic. I was in a Catholic hospital, and my doctor said she's not allowed to perform any procedure that's against our religion. Now, I'm sorry I had the ablation, and my husband and I worry about what could happen if I become pregnant. And how can I practice natural family planning if I no longer have a cycle? Was this an affront to God?

—Sad

Dear Sad,

I asked my friend, Dr. Anthony Dardano, former chief of obstetrics and gynecology at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica, New York, to respond:

Asking for consent a few minutes before performing a surgical procedure is unethical. The ablation procedure itself isn't morally objectionable, if intended to treat excessive menstrual bleeding in permanently celibate women—or postmenopausal women, when fertility isn't an issue. However, if fertilization does occur, the baby's implantation in the womb will be impaired. Thus, the ablation's potentially abortifac-

ient effect makes it morally objectionable for fertile women who are sexually active.

At 49, you might be near natural menopause. Since you no longer have a predictable cycle, a doctor can measure your serum follicle-stimulating hormone level to determine if you're in menopause. (FSH regulates reproductive processes.) If this test is negative, you'll have to repeat it at three- to six-month intervals until it becomes positive for menopause. If it shows you're still fertile, you can use a home ovulation test kit to determine your fertile days each month, avoiding marital relations during that time, just as when using NFP. This would be morally acceptable.

Judie Brown is president of American Life League and a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Dr. Anthony Dardano is a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and a member of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists. He is former chief of obstetrics and gynecology, and former chairman of resident education, at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica, New York.

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