

Routine episiotomy should be abandoned, according to a study appearing in the December 18/25 issue of *The Lancet*.

The Argentine Episiotomy Trial Collaborative Group reached this conclusion after examining the results of a large multicenter trial involving 2606 women, all of whom were either having their first or second baby. The women were randomly assigned to either a selective or routine episiotomy group. "Selective episiotomy" was defined as avoiding episiotomy at all instances except for fetal indications and imminent perineal trauma; "routine episiotomy" was defined as performing an episiotomy as outlined in existing hospital guidelines.

Perineal pain, healing complications, dehiscence, and perineal posterior trauma were more common in women in the routine group. Furthermore fewer women in the selective group had to have perineal repair. However, fewer women undergoing routine episiotomy had anterior labial tears.

"There is no reliable evidence that routine use of episiotomy has any beneficial effect, and there is clear evidence that it may cause harm," says Jose Belizan, MD, part of the collaborative research group. In fact, he recommends abandoning the routine use of episiotomy.

Although Norbert Gleicher, MD, president of the Center for Human Reproduction in Chicago, concurs that episiotomy is often unnecessary in women who have previously delivered an infant, he does not rule out the procedure entirely. "They are more frequently needed in first deliveries than

in subsequent ones because the muscles around the vagina are more rigid then."

Damaged spinal cord can repair itself, at least in laboratory rats. In separate studies, reported in the January 13 issue of *Nature* magazine, researchers severed the spinal cords in laboratory rats to determine what, if any, regeneration and function return over time.

In the first study, conducted by investigators at Kyoto University in Japan, 60 rats had their spinal cords experimentally severed at a point that controls the use of the hind legs. The spinal cord in 14 of 22 rats with normal orientation regenerated seamlessly, and the rats regained function in their hind legs.

In a second study, performed at the University of Zurich, Switzerland and the Max Planck Institute in Germany, scientists partially cut the spinal cords of young adult rats. Neurotrophin-3 (NT-3) was injected into the spinal cord wounds in some rats, while a substance that inactivates one of the inhibitory nerve chemicals was also injected into the brains of another group of rats. A "sprouting" of the severed fibers developed in this second group of rats. The fibers did not grow very long. Only when the brain injections inactivated the growth inhibitor agent did the fibers lengthen.

Although these studies suggest that the spinal cord can repair itself, the researchers would not speculate whether this reparation and restoration of function

can occur in human beings.

Physicians still enjoy being doctors, despite the increased stress they face in their practices. That's the major finding from a survey of 406 physicians in Solano County, Calif. Of the 251 responding physicians, 80% said that they were satisfied with their job, and 92% said they felt good about their ability to help their patients.

Questionnaires were mailed to 406 allopathic physicians practicing primary care and specialty medicine. In this survey, recipients were asked about their satisfaction in the following areas: overall being a physician, professional and personal relationships, working conditions, business and administration issues, and compensation and benefits.

Physicians were in solo or specialty group fee-for-service practices. On average, the physicians had been practicing medicine for 12 years at the time of the survey, conducted in spring 1992. Both primary care physicians and specialists were included.

Osteopathic physicians interviewed by telephone by JAOA staff expressed similar satisfaction.

"I enjoy taking care of all the members of the family. There's always something different in every examining room that I enter," admits Larry Anderson, DO, a family practitioner in Lithonia, Ga.

Adds Cynthia D. Owens, DO, an internist practicing in Pascagoula, Miss, "I would still choose medicine. This is a childhood dream [come true]." ♦