



Abortion Rights  
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à  
l'avortement au Canada

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## ***Position Paper #70***

### **Abortion and Breast Cancer: An Evidence-Based Perspective**

All women have the right to be presented with pregnancy options in a non-judgmental, unbiased manner. Bias, misinformation, and coercion are a violation of the fundamental rights of all women. The anti-choice movement commonly uses misinformation to scare women out of having abortions. Of the many false statements presented as fact, one of the most common is the purported link between breast cancer and therapeutic abortion. However, after evaluating current, reliable evidence on the subject, ARCC, in agreement with the vast majority of all reputable medical associations, believes that there is no link between therapeutic abortion and the development of breast cancer.

#### **What do current scientific studies and medical associations say about the link between abortion and breast cancer?**

Determining whether there is a link between abortion and breast cancer (ABC) has been the subject of extensive scientific research. The anti-choice movement is able to manipulate some data because literature prior to the 1990s was largely inconsistent – many studies have serious methodological flaws (small sample size, insufficient controls for variability, researcher bias). More contemporary studies, which corrected the above-mentioned methodological flaws, show that there is no demonstrable link between therapeutic abortions and breast cancer; there is neither an increase nor decrease in breast cancer among women who have had a therapeutic abortion (for specific references, please consult the endnotes).

Perhaps the most significant evidence refuting the ABC link comes from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the United States. In 2002, the NCI posted a report on its website dispelling myths about ABC. When this report was criticized by anti-choice members of Congress, the NCI held a conference, “Early Reproductive Events and Breast Cancer” in 2003 in Bethesda, MD. This conference brought together 100 cancer experts and epidemiologists to examine the data and provide a clear statement of fact. Their conclusion was that **it is well-established that induced abortion [a.k.a therapeutic abortion] is not associated with an increased risk of breast cancer.**

Several other organizations have also produced position statements with regards to the so-called ABC link. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and the Society of

Gynecologic Oncologists of Canada released a joint committee opinion statement in May 2005, which maintains that there is no link between either spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) or therapeutic abortion and the increased risk of breast cancer. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' Committee on Gynecologic Practice released an opinion statement in August 2003, with the finding that early studies demonstrating an ABC link were inconclusive, and that more recent studies argue *against* a link between abortion and breast cancer. The Canadian Cancer Society, which monitors risk factors as they pertain to cancers, agree with the NCI findings that there is no association between abortion and breast cancer.

### **What about advertising that states there is a link between Abortion and Breast Cancer?**

Data that claims to support a link between abortion and breast cancer is highly biased. First, those who advertise an ABC link are connected to organizations with the primary goal of restricting abortion, not reducing rates of breast cancer. Second, the few studies that suggest an ABC link are now considered to be out-of-date, and were not of a particularly high standard to begin with. These studies took sample sizes that were too small (i.e. small sample sizes are not representative of the whole population), and relied on patient recall rather than following people over a period of time.

### **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to pass off false information as fact. Anyone can make a website that looks professional, and anyone can write a press release. When faced with any piece of information, especially something with far-reaching consequences, it is important to be vigilant in questioning the source of such statements.

There are a few simple ways to do this:

1. Look for references. The best references come from good, peer-reviewed journals. If the information is important enough, and is sound, it will get into a good journal.
2. Look at the age of the resources. Information changes over time as we learn more and more about a topic.
3. Check the affiliations of the organizations and researchers doing the studies.
4. Beware of personal opinions. They are just that – opinions, not fact.

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