

“First, Do No Harm”

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The International Cesarean Awareness Network, Inc. (ICAN) has declared April 2004 as Cesarean Awareness Month and is asking other organizations interested in natural birth and maternal child health to help in their efforts. ICAN's campaign fits with ACNM's ongoing efforts to educate women about the true risks/benefits of cesarean section (1 - 4) and we have been getting the word out via our Web site and e-groups. We expect that many of you have already joined ICAN's efforts on a local and/or regional basis, and it is not too late to get involved.

ICAN is an international, non-profit organization founded by concerned parents and professionals in June 1982 – some of you may remember it as the Cesarean Prevention Movement. Their mission is to improve maternal-child health by preventing unnecessary cesareans through education, providing support for cesarean recovery, and promoting Vaginal Birth after Cesarean (VBAC).

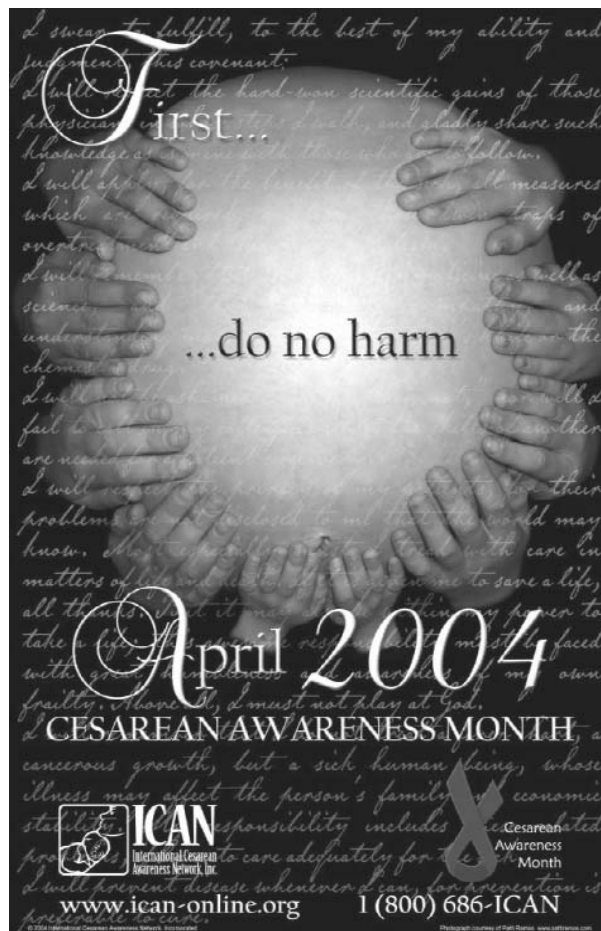
According to www.ican-online.org, ICAN has adopted a burgundy ribbon as the symbol of cesarean awareness and ICAN supporters in 12 countries around the world will observe Cesarean Awareness Month by wearing these ribbons pinned upside down. The rich red-dish color of burgundy symbolizes birth. The pinning of the ribbon upside down symbolizes the state of distress many pregnant women find themselves in

when their right to choose the method of birth for their child is dismissed. The loop of the inverted ribbon represents a pregnant belly with the tails of the ribbon denoting arms outstretched in a cry for help. ICAN has also created a poster, seen here, showing the belly of a near-term pregnant woman protected by the loving hands of her children.

In addition to the ribbons and poster, ICAN has developed an internet “banner” that they are asking others to post on their Web site. There are efforts underway to have mayors and governors across the country make formal proclamations, and ICAN has contacted the Department of Health and Human Services to have Cesarean Awareness Month put on the National Health Observance Calendar.

ICAN president Tonya Jamois notes that many cesareans are preventable – especially by the use of the midwifery model of care. Recent studies have raised awareness of the risks of cesarean birth (4) and discussions of the rising cesarean birth rate are an opportunity to talk about how midwives have been successful in facilitating normal birth and keeping Cesarean rates down.

If you are not aware of ICAN's efforts in your area, visit their Web site at www.ican-online.org and click on “chapters.” You may also contact the ICAN office at (800) 686-ICAN. Consider pinning on a ribbon, putting up a poster in your office, and adding the banner to your chapter Web site. Find out how you can collaborate with local ICAN members and others interested in curbing this rise in cesarean birth. There is strength in numbers! **Q**



References:

1. Williams DR, Shah MA. Soaring cesarean section rates: a cause for alarm. *Journal of Obstetrics Gynecology and Neonatal Nursing*. 2003; 32(3):283-284.
2. Shah MA, Williams DR. Cesarean section on demand: round one. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*. 2004; 49(2): 85-86.
3. Share with women: Should I have a cesarean section? *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*. 2004; 49(2); 475-476.
4. Leslie MS Counseling women about elective cesarean section. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* 2004; 49(2); 155-159.

Also see ACNM press release, “Soaring Cesarean Section Rates Cause for Alarm,” January 2003 (www.midwife.org/press/archive.cfm) and statement, “Women Urged to Proceed with Caution in Age of Designer Deliveries,” January 2003 (www.midwife.org/press/article-oped.cfm).

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