

ACOG Statement In Support of Fetal Tissue Research

March 30, 2016

Washington, DC – Mark S. DeFrancesco, MD, MBA, President of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), today released the following statement:

"Obstetrician-gynecologists are physicians who specialize in the care of women throughout their lives. We guide younger patients into healthy adulthood, we counsel them as they build their families, we assist them if they choose not to have children, and we help them to stay strong and well through their postmenopausal years.

"We recognize that decades of medical breakthroughs have resulted in lasting improvements in the lives of our patients and their families, and we celebrate our ability to not just treat, but in some cases, to actually prevent or even cure debilitating and life-threatening diseases.

"However, current attacks on fetal tissue research, part of an effort to oppose and disparage safe, legal abortion in this country, represent a significant setback in our Nation's approach to science and our patients' hope for future breakthroughs.

"Ob-gyns treat women battling various forms of cancer as well as diseases like Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis. Our patients may be caring for their own children with conditions that have poor prognoses, like cystic fibrosis. Scientific research has given us some tools that help us improve patient's lives and outcomes when battling these conditions, but there is more work to be done, and fetal tissue research may play an important role in tomorrow's breakthroughs.

"The current Zika virus outbreak shows that we must use the full potential of science, including fetal tissue research, if we hope to develop a vaccine or a medicine that will allow us to prevent serious birth defects and even deaths in the future. Already, scientists studying Zika have gathered strong evidence about the disease and its potential association with birth defects through fetal tissue analysis.

"Women affected by Zika virus are terrified about their own health and the health of their families. We must do everything we can to help them and protect more families faced with a Zika diagnosis during pregnancy, especially as this outbreak continues to grow.

"Unfortunately, some state and federal politicians are working hard to obstruct — or even criminalize — fetal tissue research, limiting the ability of scientists and researchers to develop new vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat disease.

"America's scientists and researchers have helped this country be a leader in medical advances, and our patients have benefited from these breakthroughs. This work benefits our communities and economy, as well. But by barring medical innovation, fetal tissue research bans will stymie U.S.-based medical progress, leaving us to rely on other countries to develop medicines for our own patients.

"Now, some in Congress want research institutions to hand over the names of individual researchers, doctors, and medical students engaged in this life-advancing research. This is an invasion of academic freedom, a serious government overreach, and an effort to intimidate scientists who have devoted their

careers to helping patients and improving lives. This is simply politicians interfering with important medical science.

"We are at a crossroads. We can either look to the future and build upon a rich foundation of American leadership in health care, or we will hamstring our researchers, attack their reputations, and leave our patients to suffer. We are better than that.

"We urge politicians to stand up not only for fundamental American freedoms, but also for families who, without this research, will have very little hope for tomorrow's cures."

ACOG has signed onto a joint letter in support of fetal tissue research. That letter can be found [here](#). *The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (The College), a 501(c)(3) organization, is the nation's leading group of physicians providing health care for women. As a private, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization of approximately 58,000 members, The College strongly advocates for quality health care for women, maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members, promotes patient education, and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women's health care. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), a 501(c)(6) organization, is its companion organization. www.acog.org*