



The Orthodox HealthPlan

A Statement from The Joint Orthodox HealthPlan Committee regarding coverage:

The challenge to live in the world but not of the world is extraordinarily difficult, particularly for Orthodox Christians in the United States. A case in point concerns conditions of the OHP insurance policy under Aetna, which offers medical coverage for "voluntary abortion" and "voluntary sterilization." Voices within the Church have been raised against this coverage, on grounds that the Orthodox Church cannot condone abortion (except in the rare cases where the mother's life is seriously jeopardized by the pregnancy), and that sterilization (tubal ligation) should be resorted to only when it is medically indicated -- a decision to be made by a married couple with the counsel of their spiritual guides.

Since abortion and sterilization, however, are legal in the U.S., Aetna and other companies are free to offer coverage for both procedures. Nevertheless, there is no requirement whatsoever that policy holders opt for those procedures. If provisions for such coverage were removed from the policy, there could arise situations where an Orthodox Christian, for example, would require some medical intervention (a hysterectomy during pregnancy, for example) that would not be covered and whose cost would have to be borne by the patient.

The question is one of personal responsibility and faithfulness to the will of God. Orthodox Christians need not and should not resort to medical procedures that are legal yet immoral (those living in the state of Oregon, for example, should not opt for physician-assisted suicide).

There is sound reason, therefore, to accept the Aetna policy as written, recognizing that some of its covered procedures are immoral in the eyes of the Church. "Freedom in the Spirit" means that neither social mores nor ecclesial authorities can dictate specific behaviors. Yet it also means that each of us is responsible before God and before one another to behave in conformity with the divine will, accepting what is appropriate and rejecting what is immoral.

To read the statement issued by the Assembly of Bishops in protest against the infringement of religious liberty by the Department of Health and Human Services, please click the following link:

<http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/releases/protest-against-hhs>