

## Chapter 2

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACCURACY OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE HUMAN PENIS IN ANATOMICAL SOURCE MATERIALS

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the accuracy of the anatomical source materials regarding the human penis that are immediately available to medical school students and medical professionals. Ninety sources were vetted for entries and images of the penis – definitions, photos, illustrations, and drawings. We find 67% of the depictions of the human penis are anatomically incorrect. Of the primary images of the human penis, 71% are incorrect, while 54% of the secondary are incorrect. It is evident that the penis is misrepresented in the medical literature used in medical schools. The penis is routinely defined and depicted in a partially amputated condition, as if this were a natural state, without explanation or caveat. This study indicates that students are being misinformed about fundamental anatomy.

**Key words:** Medical education, penis, foreskin, prepuce, circumcision

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the accuracy of the anatomical source materials regarding the human penis that are immediately available to medical school students and medical professionals. Section 2 describes the sources that were analyzed. Section 3.1 presents our principal (numerical) findings (percentages of correct and incorrect presentations of

the penis/foreskin), while section 3.2 includes a number of individual observations. Section 4 includes a discussion of what our findings tell us about the way circumcision is perceived and dealt with in the medical profession, and the consequences thereof for the professional and the public.

## **2. SOURCES**

The source materials on which this study is based are those available to medical students and medical professionals in five Los Angeles, California college campus bookstores and two biomedical libraries.<sup>1</sup> The source materials include medical textbooks, life-sized medical models, medical study aids, medical charts, medical dictionaries, medical encyclopedias, medical catalogues, and (medical) general interest books; the findings hereinafter referred to as entries and images.

Ninety (90) sources were vetted for entries and images of the human penis – definitions, photos, illustrations, and drawings.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. FINDINGS**

### **3.1 Principal Findings**

In the 90 sources, we found three hundred sixty-five (365) images of the penis. Of these 365 images, one hundred twenty-two (122), 33%, showed anatomically correct depictions of the foreskin, while two hundred forty-three (243), 67%, showed penises from which the foreskin had been amputated. Of those 243 disfigured images, only one includes an explanation of why the foreskin was absent.<sup>3</sup>

When the primary images (which present the penis as the direct subject of study or discussion) and secondary images (which show the penis incidental to an image of another organ, e.g. the bladder or the hip joint), are distinguished and separated, we find that primary images are more often incorrect than secondary images. Out of two hundred seventy-two (272) primary images of the penis, only seventy-nine (79), 29%, were anatomically correct in their depiction of the foreskin. One hundred ninety-three (193), 71%, were anatomically incorrect (i.e. foreskin absent) in their depiction of the foreskin. Out of ninety-three (93) secondary images of the penis,<sup>4</sup> forty-three (43), 46%, were anatomically correct in their depiction of the foreskin. Fifty (50), 54%, were anatomically incorrect in their depiction of the foreskin.