Surgeon Resigns ACS Leadership Post Over Controversial Editorial

John Flesher, Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — The world's largest organization of surgeons has accepted the resignation of its president-elect after he wrote a Valentine's Day column for the group's newspaper that some members found demeaning to women.

Dr. Lazar J. Greenfield, a renowned surgeon and professor emeritus at the University of Michigan Medical School, said Monday he had stepped down from his leadership post with the American College of Surgeons after the association's board rejected his attempts to make amends.

His column divided the 77,000-member group, with some saying it insulted women and exposed a male-dominated culture within the profession.

Greenfield's defenders said he had encouraged many aspiring women surgeons and accused his critics of overreacting to a clumsy attempt at humor.

In the Surgery News editorial, Greenfield described semen as a mood enhancer for women and referred to a scientific study that described female college students who had unprotected sex as less depressed than those whose partners used condoms.

"So there's a deeper bond between men and women than St. Valentine would have suspected, and now we know there's a better gift for that day than chocolates," Greenfield wrote.

The column inspired a backlash and eventually was removed from the publication's website, but critics said that wasn't enough.

Dr. Colleen Brophy, a professor of surgery at Vanderbilt University, said she was so angered by the column and what she considered the group's slow response that she resigned.

"I have two teen-age daughters," Brophy said in a telephone interview. "What bothered me most was that a member of our leadership could advocate for unprotected sex. Even if he meant it as a joke, the way he wrote it came across as blatant. And it's not even an appropriate joke."

Greenfield also misinterpreted the study, Brophy said. The data actually showed that women whose partners always used condoms were less depressed than those whose partners usually used them, and the authors cautioned that their findings

were preliminary, she said.

In her resignation letter, she described Greenfield's opinion piece as "insensitive, offensive and outrageous."

Dr. Wendy Wahl, a professor of surgery at the University of Michigan, said Greenfield selected her as an intern and supervised her residency in the late 1980s, a period when the field "was not very friendly toward women." He chose three women for his initial seven-member internship class and treated them well, she said.

"He's been a role model and mentor, very supportive of my career as well as other women who trained under him," Wahl said. She said the editorial showed "an error in judgment" but did not justify denying Greenfield the group's presidency.

"He's someone who's done more to promote women in surgery than most people have, and he's being tarred and feathered," she said.

Greenfield, 76, said Monday in a written statement that he met with the surgeons' association board and apologized.

"I accepted responsibility for using scientific material in a light-hearted way to review new biochemical findings in sexuality," he said. "These findings show the remarkable way nature has promoted strong bonding between men and women, a gift rather than something demeaning."

Greenfield said the board ignored his apologies and rejected his offer to use his experience to educate others, so he resigned as president-elect "rather than have this remain a disruptive issue."

In a letter to members, the Chicago-based surgeons group praised Greenfield for his accomplishments, including invention of the Greenfield Filter, which prevents potentially deadly blood vessel obstructions.

"We also know that at this critical juncture for surgery and health care in America, it is important that the American College of Surgeons not be distracted by any issues that would diminish its focus on improving care of the surgical patient," the letter said.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/02/2015 - 8:20am*):
http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com/news/2011/04/surgeon-resigns-acs-leadership-post-over-controversial-editorial