

Disentangling Disability and Health

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Recent news reports about a radical treatment to stunt a child's growth and ensure she remained forever small, highlight the importance of a human rights approach to disability and a disability rights approach to health. The child, Ashley, is intellectually disabled and totally dependent on others for all aspects of daily life. She lives at home with her family. When Ashley was six years old her uterus and breast buds were surgically removed and she received high-dose estrogen therapy. The aim of the treatment was to stop her growth, which until this time had been normal, so that she could be lifted and moved without the use of hoists or other devices.¹ Ashley's parents maintain that the motivation for the "treatment" was to improve Ashley's quality of life.² In an echo of earlier arguments for non-therapeutic sterilisation of disabled children, the parents state in their blog that:

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- 1 The treatment though, prohibited by law, was performed in a specialist children's hospital in the USA, with the consent of Ashley's parents and the approval of an ethics committee. The hospital was apparently unaware that the parents had no legal capacity to consent to the treatment and that the law required court authorisation before any surgery. An investigation by a disability advocacy group, Washington Protection and Advocacy System, revealed that the hospital thought it was sufficient that the parents' lawyer believed (wrongly) that a court order was not required.
 - 2 "The Ashley Treatment", available at <<http://ashleytreatment.spaces.live.com/blog>> (last accessed 11 May 2007). This blog is maintained by Ashley's parents.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.