



[Home](#) » [News](#) » [Europe](#)

## Fetuses may feel pain as early as 20 weeks, doctor clarifies

*By Estefania Aguirre and Carl Bunderson*

Siena, Italy, Jun 27, 2013 / 01:34 pm (CNA).- An Italian doctor has clarified that fetuses may be capable of feeling pain and pleasure as early as 20 weeks after their conception, after a June 19 article in Time may have led some to believe otherwise.

The Time article quoted a paper co-authored by Carlo Bellieni, from the department of pediatrics, obstetrics and reproductive medicine at the University Hospital of Siena, which says there is “consistent evidence of the possibility for the fetus to experience pain in the third trimester, and this evidence is weaker before this date and null in the first half of pregnancy.”

Time used this quote to characterize Bellieni as having reported that “while it was difficult to truly determine when the first feelings of pain emerged, such sensations likely begin in the third trimester.”

“But this can look like I said that the fetus doesn’t feel pain in the second trimester at all,” Bellieni told CNA June 24.

While acknowledging that his paper was correctly quoted by Time, he added that “saying ‘this evidence is weaker’ does not mean that it is absent.”

“In fact, I pointed out that evidence of fetal pain is ‘null in the first half of pregnancy’ – meaning that after 20 weeks, there is evidence that fetuses can experience pain.

That fetuses “can feel pain in their twentieth ... week can’t be excluded,” Bellieni said.

While “we don’t know exactly when pain sensations begin,” it is as early as 20, and as late as 24 weeks.

Bellieni has also written that “painful stimuli can arrive to the brain at 20-22 weeks of gestation.

“We need more research, because there is not so much out there,” he emphasized.

The doctor believes this is due to a “lack of interest,” adding that “we have the moral obligation” since fetal surgery is possible.

“Fetal surgery has greater possibility of success the bigger the fetus is, but studies show surgery is possible in the first half of the pregnancy.”

“Most of fetal pain research has been made on babies who are outside the womb and have been born, but are premature,” he added.

The Time article was written against the background over debate around the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which was passed in the House June 18.

The bill would prohibit abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, stating that “there is substantial medical evidence that an unborn child is capable of experiencing pain at least by 20 weeks after fertilization, if not earlier.”

Though the bill has passed the House, it must still pass the Senate, and the White House has suggested that if it arrives on President Obama's desk he will veto it.

The administration stated that the bill “shows contempt for women's health and rights, the role doctors play in their patients' health care decisions, and the Constitution.”

Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), who introduced the legislation, argued in a June 13 statement that “knowingly subjecting our innocent unborn children to dismemberment in the womb, particularly when they have developed to the point that they can feel excruciating pain every terrible moment leading up to their undeserved deaths, belies everything America was called to be.”

“This is not who we are,” he said.

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/fetuses-may-feel-pain-as-early-as-20-weeks-doctor-clarifies/>