Letter to the Editor

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Reply

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We appreciated Dr. Henn's comments about the recently published premarital screening study [1]. We would like to emphasize once more that the study was conducted in a region where hemoglo-binopathies constitute a major health problem. For many years in the past we were asked to carry out premarital screening studies not by the health authorities but by our patients' parents as well as by many apparently healthy subjects who were aware of the disease. In many developing countries including Turkey, the ideal treatment for he-moglobinopathies is available only to a minority of the patients, leaving the majority to suffer the devastating consequences of the disease.

In our study, we offered prospective couples the opportunity to be tested easily and correctly after genetic counseling. No decision was imposed on the couples and only one fourth of them agreed to participate [1]. As correctly pointed out by Dr. Henn, 'even two carriers of a recessive disease have a realistic chance of becoming blessed with healthy children', but it may also happen otherwise. One of the major aims of this study was to make sure by offering prenatal diagnosis that such couples have healthy offspring. Carrier couples have the freedom to refuse prenatal diagnosis and carry the pregnancy to term. With screening studies and genetic counseling, having a child affected with this disorder will not be fate but a conscious decision of the parents.

Prenatal diagnosis and health care of a sick child are very expensive. Under such circumstances, in addition to the psychological impact of the disease, the financial burden becomes impossible to cope with for those who do not possess some form of health insurance. This was probably the major motive behind the decision of the two couples (6% of the carrier couples) who broke.

Reference

Altay C, Yilgör E, Beksac S, Gürgey A: Premarital screening of hemoglo-binopathies: A pilot study in Turkey. Hum. Hered. 1996;46:112-114.

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