
Beauty of the Placenta

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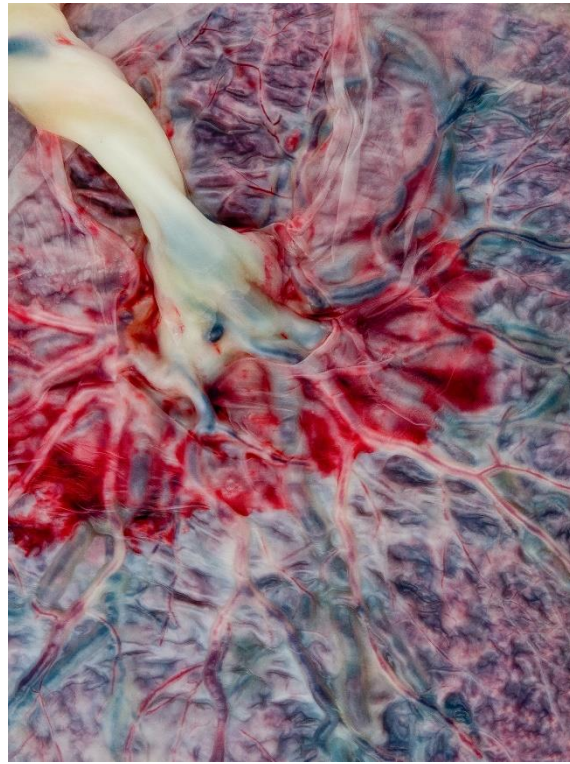
Image Description

The extremely complexed life-giving organ, the placenta is a true wonder in the process of the cycle of life. While most of the organs in the human body are designed to last a lifetime, the placenta is perfunctorily discarded once its purpose is accomplished. Even though this organs role is critical during pregnancy it's amazing that it is probably one of the poorest understood organs in the human body. This organ acts as a mediator between mother and child, carefully regulating the exchange of nutrients and metabolites and even disposes of waste products. Somewhat extraterrestrial in appearance, the placenta has a raw, red surface that blends with the uterine wall as well as a shiny, pearlescent surface interwoven with vascular offshoots and tributaries.

The surface, in the photograph, faces the developing fetus and serves as the attachment area for the umbilical cord. The cord itself, is an unassuming rope-like structure that is about the breadth of an adult woman's index finger. It functions as the universal lifeline, without which we cannot begin to develop. The placenta and its cord embodies our first human relationship, but it also provides the means for our first taste of separation, and the first independence from the mother.

This photograph is from a completely healthy and normal full-term pregnancy.

There is beauty in the delicate lacework of fungal hyphae invading a blood vessel, the structure of the cerebellum, and the desperate drive of metastatic carcinoma cells. This developing appreciation of the structure of disease is bittersweet. As a physician, one has an amazing oppourtunity to get a behind the scenes look into the human body and simultaneously experience both an awe of beauty and a glimpse of the pain of those who have personal experience with the process of disease. Which as humans, it is one of the many things we all share in common [1-5].



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