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March Madness, Vasectomies Are an Unlikely Pairing Filling Urology Offices

Clinics market procedure so recovery time allows guilt-free TV viewing

By *Christine Mai-Duc* [Follow](#)

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March is a special time for college basketball fans, who kick back on the couch for days to watch the two-week NCAA tournament known as March Madness.

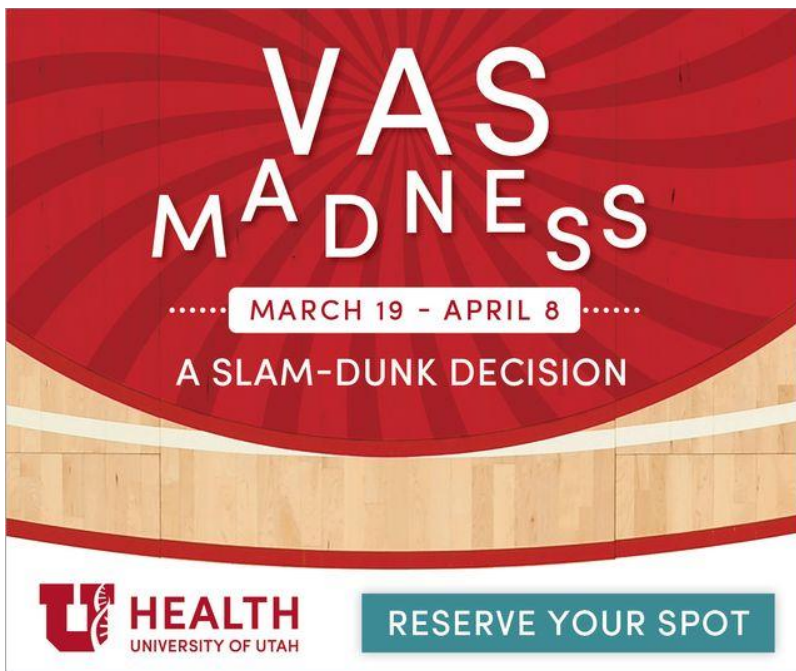
It also has become a shining moment for some urologists, who see the games as a perfect time to peddle vasectomies.

The idea of pairing male family planning with March Madness appears to have started in 2008, when the Oregon Urology Institute decided that the games were an ideal distraction for men recovering from the sterilization surgery.

Fifteen years later, “Vas Madness” specials are increasingly common throughout the country, with university-run clinics and other large providers offering vasectomies paired with basketball-themed swag—and usually a bag of frozen peas, legumes whose malleability makes them superior to ice packs for soothing particularly sensitive areas.

“Ready to sit this one out on the sidelines?” reads an ad from one Missouri clinic advertising Vas Madness. “Recover on the couch, glued to the TV, guilt-free, under doctor’s orders,” promises another from a Philadelphia practice.

Terry FitzPatrick, administrator of the Oregon Urology Institute, said he was looking for a way to link vasectomies to big-ticket sporting events when he settled on the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s tournament to reach his target audience. He worked with a local ad agency, and they dubbed the promotion “Snip City,” after the National Basketball Association’s Portland Trail Blazers’ longtime catchphrase “Rip City.”



University of Utah Health's previous Vas Madness campaign included digital advertising.

PHOTO: U OF U HEALTH MARKETING

Other urology clinics have seized on the marketing play.

Akron-based Summa Health, one of the largest healthcare systems in Ohio, is running its seventh annual Vas Madness campaign this year. Over the next few weeks, urologists there will perform more than 150 vasectomies, a procedure that involves snipping and cauterizing the vas deferens, far above the typical volume of about 15, said Dr. Kevin Spear, chair of the urology department.

When University of Utah Health launched its Vas Madness promotion in 2015, it saw the number of vasectomies bounce to 53 from 8 the year before, says Lori Williams, associate director of marketing.

“As a healthcare system, it’s fun to do something different, instead of, ‘Ugh, do you need a breast cancer screening, oh, go get your mammogram,’” Ms. Williams said.

The swag accompanying the annual “benchwarmer pass” special at Ogden Clinic in northern Utah has included branded sweat bands, fleece blankets and, one year, a shot at two tickets to the tournament itself.

In Medford, Ore., the T-shirts doctors and staff sport during “Snip Madness” at Rogue Valley Urology have gained something of a cult following, says clinic administrator Jennifer Adams. “Make this March a slam dunk with a snip to your junk,” the staff shirts say.



Rogue Valley Urology's staff wear specially-designed "Snip Madness" promotional T-shirts.

PHOTO: ROGUE VALLEY UROLOGY

Edward Sankey, a 43-year-old storage facility manager in Gold Hill, Ore., says seeing Rogue Valley Urology's ads on Facebook gave him the nudge he needed to schedule an appointment. He has four children, the youngest of whom is 10, and will soon welcome his third grandchild.

By the time he called the clinic this past January, all the prime appointments had been snagged. He had to settle for April Fools' Day, though it's still technically part of the promotional period.

"I can't wait to wear the shirt," he says. "That's just an added bonus."

During the two weekends the clinic runs the promotion, the staff orders pizza and keep waiting room TVs tuned to the games. "It's just fun. The staff absolutely love it. The men love it," Ms. Adams said.

A local radio station asks listeners to nominate candidates for a chance to win a complimentary spot in the clinic's Snip Madness bracket. Once, the lucky winner even got snipped live on-air, a stunt that was never repeated.



Dr. Patrick Davol performs as many as 20 procedures daily during Rogue Valley Urology's promotional event .
PHOTO: ROGUE VALLEY UROLOGY

Dr. Patrick Davol, who performs as many as 20 procedures a day during the promotional event, has a playlist that includes “Big Balls” by AC/DC and ’80s pop anthem “Do You Really Want To Hurt Me.” Patients are sent on their way with a care package that includes a referee whistle and a can of Vas Deferens, a dark Belgian ale inspired by a local microbrewer’s own vasectomy.

For Indianapolis native and insurance broker Dylan Melling, 33, getting a vasectomy during March Madness last year made perfect sense. He and his wife, Ashlee, had decided they were done having biological children after she had difficult pregnancies.

“We would have been watching eight to 10 hours of basketball a day anyway,” adds Mr. Melling, a lifelong fan of the Hoosiers, the men’s basketball team at Indiana University.

Not everyone is on board. In 2021, lawyers for the NCAA successfully went after a Virginia clinic for trying to register the term “Vasectomy Mayhem,” a play on an alternate nickname for the tournament, citing the “likelihood of confusion” between the tournament’s brand and the clinic.

“We don’t currently have an official urologist of the NCAA tournament,” says Doug Masters, who represented the NCAA in the case. But that doesn’t preclude the league from having one

in the future.

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