



FDA DECISION ON "EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION" RECEIVES CRITICISM

Planned Parenthood pushes emergency contraception on its "Teenwire" website

"You had sex and the condom broke. Your older sister had too much to drink and forgot to use protection. Your best friend was raped. All three of you would probably think the same thing: "What if I get pregnant? It can be really scary to think you might be pregnant when you don't want to be. Fortunately there's an option in emergency situations like this that can actually prevent pregnancy before it happens...emergency contraception pills (ECPs). 'Accidents and mistakes happen to people every day,' explains Brita, 17, 'And that's why EC is available...to try to fix the accident or mistake before it is life-altering."

www.teenwire.com/infocus/2004/if_20040521p291_EC.asp

Better sex Ed needed?

According to the same article promoted to teens, one of the reasons that so many teens are promiscuous and ignorant about their options when sexually active is that **they do not have enough comprehensive sex education in schools**. They believe that comprehensive sex education will make teens more responsible and correct in their decisions and use birth control correctly. "If the FDA is against having ECPs be available over the counter, then comprehensive sexual education, including education about matters concerning effective forms of birth control as well as abstinence, should be the federal government's number-one priority when it comes to reproductive health. However, no matter what they say about abstinence it is almost never given a prominent place in comprehensive sex education. In fact, it is usually mentioned in passing assuming that most kids are unable to control their sexual impulses.

The FDA gets it right

The Food and Drug Administration has decided that so-called emergency contraception or the morning-after-pill may not be offered over-the-counter without a prescription. The agency cited the fact that not enough adolescent studies had been done to evaluate the risks to young teen-agers. However, the FDA did give Barr Laboratories the company manufacturing Plan B an opportunity to fill in those gaps in the research, so the pills could be approved at a later date. The two choices that Barr Laboratories has to get Plan B approved are: undertake a new study among girls 16 years old and younger to show that they can use the drug safely without the help of a doctor. Or the company must write a new label and construct a system that would allow women older than 16 to buy the drug over-the-counter while those younger than 17 would be forced to get a prescription. Barr Laboratories issued a statement: "We are encouraged by the FDA's suggestions, and look forward to working with the agency toward approval." Wendy Wright, senior policy director at CWA, stated after the FDA refused over-the-counter approval: "The FDA is right to be cautious about having a potent drug that can be harmful to women sitting next to candy bars and toothpaste. Broad availability of Plan B would allow people to slip the medicine to women without their knowledge."

Planned Parenthood's reaction to the FDA decision

Gloria Feldt president of Planned Parenthood and Wendy Wright senior policy director of CWA, in an interview with PBS' Ray Suarez made some interesting statements.

Gloria Feldt: (Excerpted from the interview)

- "So, it's a method of contraception...emergency contraception is contraception...it prevents pregnancy from occurring...it could prevent half of all the abortions that occur in the United States, and I would think that that would be a very good outcome from most people's perspective." **[Last month's Family Concerns deals with whether or not emergency contraception is really always contraception or a mini-abortion]**
- "...emergency contraception has been very extensively researched..."
- "There are no studies at all that have found in any way that there is a correlation between increased teen pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections and the use of emergency contraception..."
- "...And it's about enabling women to plan and space their child bearing responsibly. Emergency contraception is contraception and it is used in an emergency."
- "...package labeling will be clear and will explain to women, and they will be able to understand it. I think that Wendy and her group have a very low estimation of women's ability to make decisions for themselves and to understand what's going on with their own bodies."

Wendy Wright (Excerpted from the interview)

- "Well, actually there have been no studies done to find out what kind of medical effects this will have on women in the long term. And there have been no studies done on what kind of effect it has on women who take it multiple times."
- "In Scotland where it's also readily available (in addition to the United Kingdom) they found that teen pregnancies went up and abortions went up. So what this seems to imply that is people will engage in risky sexual behavior, including behavior that will end up causing sexually transmitted diseases because they're expecting that they can rely on the morning after pill to prevent a pregnancy, then they're not as concerned about protecting themselves against sexually transmitted diseases."
- "There have been no studies done on adolescents, which is now required by law. (Pediatric Research Equity Act) It requires that if a drug is going to be used by adolescents, it needs to be tested to make sure that it's safe on adolescents. Adolescent bodies are different from adults. Anyone who has a teenager knows they go through rapid hormonal changes and this is a high dose of a hormone."

CWA's press release

In a press release by CWA on April 12, 2004, Wendy Wright states: "It's a ridiculous notion that putting an age restriction on who buys the drug does anything to address who consumes the drug. An 18-year-old store clerk could sell it to his 17-year-old friend (or a 40-year-old statutory rapist) who then slips it to his 15-year-old girlfriend...who may then suffer a serious complication caused by the drug aggravating an existing medical condition. Rather than address these concerns, proponents claim opposition is based on 'politics.' This is quite revealing. Apparently to them, women's medical health and public health are only 'political,' and should not be considered. Either they choose to ignore the scientific and medical arguments because they do not have an answer, or they simply do not care what happens to women and girls."