



PEDIATRICIANS AND NARAL PRO-CHOICE AMERICA GET IT WRONG ON ABSTINENCE

Teens at risk for STDS

The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) has as its slogan, "Dedicated to the Health of All Children"; however in its most recent statement concerning promoting abstinence to teens, it has forgotten some of the terrible physical and emotional effects that contracting an STD can have for a teen. They have ignored some of the statistics that clearly show that condoms do not adequately protect against these often lifelong viral diseases; they have ignored the fact that young teens, particularly young girls, are exceptionally susceptible to STD pathogens, rendering them infertile, and exposing their future children to the diseases transmitted through the birth canal. They appear to have forgotten that condoms do not always protect against STDS; they also have ignored the fact that some contraceptives change the mucosal lining of the reproductive tract, rendering it more permeable to these pathogens. Yet, in the updated version of the journal **Pediatrics** the statement is made that while "abstinence counseling is an important role for all pediatricians" it dilutes that statement by further encouraging pediatricians to ensure access to birth control and "emergency" contraception, thus ensuring non-compliance to the message of delaying sexual activity.

Some doctors disagree

Dr. Glenn Ridder, Chairman of the Abstinence Clearinghouse's Medical Advisory Council (85 members) states, "Part of medical training is spent studying sexually transmitted diseases, how they are contracted and what symptoms may manifest as a result. Certainly the AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) knows of the very real dangers of human papillomavirus, an STD than cannot be protected against by contraception and is the leading cause of cervical cancer in the world. Encouraging teens to rely only on contraception breaks the medical code of ethics, first, do no harm."

The American Academy of Pediatricians' Dr. S. Paige Herweck, a pediatrician-gynecologist at the University of Louisville claims that "abstinence-only" education leads to higher teen pregnancy rates in spite of numerous studies that indicate otherwise.

Some studies that uphold abstinence as a viable way to prevent teen tragedy

- A Texas A&M study conducted in 2003 found that "When compared with the general teen population, teens who participate in abstinence education programs have significantly lower sexual activity rates."

- An August 2002 study by Northwestern University Medical School researcher John S. Lyons, Ph.D. discovered that "youth have a clearer understanding of abstinence and of the health consequences of engaging in or refraining from sexual activity after participating in" an abstinence-only program.
- A 2004 study by the Heritage Foundation tracked teens over four years and compared teens who took an abstinence pledge with those who didn't. They found, after three separate periods of analysis spaced years apart, that pledgers were one-third less likely than non-pledgers to have sex before the age of 18. The study also found that those who made a pledge to abstain were 50% less likely to have an out-of-wedlock births and were less likely to have contracted an STD.
- A 2004 Zogby poll indicates that parents overwhelmingly support abstinence being taught to their children.
- A recent Health and Human Services study released in June 2005 confirms that abstinence education works. It concluded that teens who participated in abstinence programs had an increased awareness of the potential consequences of sexual activity before marriage, thought more highly of abstinent behaviors, and less favorably about sexual activity before marriage. HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Michael O'Grady states, "Students who are in these [abstinence-only] programs are recognizing that abstinence is a positive choice. Abstinence education programs that help our young people address issues of healthy relationships self-esteem, decision-making, and effective communications are important to keeping them healthy and safe."

NARAL's view of abstinence

The National Abortion Rights Action League Pro-Choice America's Washington chapter disagrees with abstinence. In fact, they recently put out a flyer that reads: "Throw your hands up and say it loud; 'Screw Abstinence!'" This is an invitation to a "Screw Abstinence Party" in which invitees are given the opportunity to "let them know you keep it real when it comes to your sexual health and decision-making." T-shirts emblazoned with the "Screw Abstinence" message are for sale at the event.

A difference in worldviews

In light of overwhelming evidence of the devastating effects of STDS not only physically but mentally and the lifelong results, it appears that if we err we should err on the side of safety for our children. NARAL ProChoice America and the American Academy of Pediatrics seems only bent on having their way at all cost . . . and that cost is being paid by our children.