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COMMENTARY **CONTRACEPTION**

How Mary Got Her IUD: Religiously-Affiliated Hospital Denies Employee Life-Saving Birth Control Method

Feb 24, 2012, 4:40pm Dr. Tara Kumaraswami

As a physician, I am so thankful that I have birth control as a way to help my patients. But like my colleagues across the nation, I am tired of insurance plans getting in the way of women's health.

In Chicago, IL today, Friday, February 24, at noon CST, Tara Kumaraswami, MD, joined Representatives Mike Quigley and Jan Schakowsky as a guest speaker at "Women Speak Out for Birth Control." Dr. Kumaraswami is an obstetrician/gynecologist in Chicago and a Fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health.

See all our coverage of the 2012 Contraceptive Mandate here.

Good afternoon. I am Dr. Tara Kumaraswami, and I am an obstetrician/gynecologist here in Chicago. I have the privilege of working with women every day, helping them stay healthy, avoid unintended pregnancy, and have healthy pregnancies when they are ready to become parents.

Today I am representing Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, a national network of doctors across the country who care deeply about improving our patients' access to contraception and other reproductive health care. My colleagues and I see what happens when women can't afford the contraceptive they need because their insurance doesn't cover it.



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I want to tell you about a 28-year-old mother of two, whom I'll call "Mary." She works as a medical assistant at a religiously-affiliated hospital. She had multiple complications with her most recent pregnancy and was told that she should never become pregnant again. For Mary, another pregnancy could be life-threatening. Mary loves her two children and wants to make sure she stays healthy for them. She and her obstetrician decided that an IUD would be the best way to prevent a future pregnancy.

At her doctor's office, Mary found out that her insurance, which she receives through her job, does not cover contraception. She was surprised and confused: why wouldn't her insurance cover what her doctor recommended for her to stay healthy and alive?

I met Mary when she came to our Title X family planning clinic. We were able to provide her with an IUD through a grant. It was unfair to Mary that her insurance did not adequately protect her health, and further, that she wasn't told in advance about this huge gap in her coverage. Women like Mary should be able to rely on their insurance plans for the resources to stay healthy and be there for their families.

For patients like Mary, avoiding unintended pregnancy is a matter of life and death. Other women depend on birth control for other medical reasons: reducing heavy periods that, untreated, require blood transfusions; easing debilitating pain from endometriosis or severe periods; and reducing the risk of cancer of the uterus and the ovaries.

For many other women I see, birth control has a different kind of importance, allowing them to plan and space pregnancies so that they can continue their educations, pursue their careers, support their families, and achieve their life goals. We can't underestimate the contributions women have made to their families, their workplaces, and our society because they can decide when to have children.

As a physician, I am so thankful that I have birth control as a way to help my patients. But like my colleagues across the nation, I am tired of insurance plans getting in the way of women's health. Every woman deserves affordable access to birth control and its many benefits. This is a matter of health, medicine, and morality. Our sisters, our cousins, our neighbors, and our friends should all have insurance coverage for contraception, no matter where they work. Thank you.

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