
M.D. TO BE

A loss for fans of birth control

By **Marianne DiNapoli** on December 8, 2011 at 6:54 AM

Yesterday was a sad day for those of us who believe all people of reproductive age should have easy access to birth control.

Plan B, or the "morning after pill," was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for over-the-counter sale to girls and women of any age, not just their previous recommendation of 17 and older. However, Kathleen Sebelius, the secretary of Health and Human Services, overturned that decision yesterday. That means that if a girl 16 years old or younger needs emergency contraception, she will first need to call her doctor for an appointment, go to the appointment, get the prescription, fill the prescription, and then pick it up from the pharmacy. Why put up all these roadblocks to prevent teens from accessing birth control?

Just to be clear: Plan B *is not* an abortion pill. It contains the hormone levonorgestrel, which is a synthetic form of a hormone naturally made in the female body. It is also the same hormone found in daily birth control pills. The primary mechanism of action of the drug is to prevent ovulation, when the ovaries release an egg that can then be fertilized. By stopping ovulation, Plan B cuts the pregnancy rate by approximately half.

Kathleen Sebelius claims the risks to young teens who take Plan B have not been properly assessed. Understandable, but the risk associated with a young teen bearing a child are *far, far* greater than any hormone could be. I simply can't comprehend why anyone would want to make it harder for young teenagers to prevent an unintended pregnancy, which could then lead to an abortion or the birth of an unwanted child.

As a future OB/GYN, I'm infuriated by Ms. Sebelius' decision. What are *your* thoughts on the issue?

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