



Christus Medicus Foundation

"Together we must build a culture of life" Pope John Paul II

Comments Presented to The Institute of Medicine Committee on Preventive Services for Women

By

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Background

On November 16, the government, Planned Parenthood and other proponents of abortion and contraception attempted to mandate free coverage for contraceptives in the new health plan. Thanks to your support the Christus Medicus Foundation was present to speak out for religious freedom and individual right of conscience.

By way of background, the Committee on Preventive Services for Women – which met for the first time on Tuesday, November 16 – was created by the Institute of Medicine at the direction of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Institute of Medicine appointed a committee and developed a meeting agenda that was clearly biased toward providing contraception as a free preventive service. A majority of the committee members and invited speakers are in some way affiliated with organizations which promote providing free, confidential contraception for teenagers.

In addition to attending the committee meeting and providing testimony, The Christus Medicus Foundation alerted other pro-life organizations to the opportunity to impact the process. Also present were representatives from Americans United for Life, the Family Research Council, Catholic Charities, Christus Medicus ActiveCare, Tepeyac Family Center and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This committee has until August 2011 to provide final recommendations. We will continue to monitor this committee and encourage you to do the same. Here is the address for the Institute of Medicine Web site where you can add your comments: <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/cp/projectview.aspx?key=49271>

Following is the text of our comments.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments to your committee. I want to applaud many of the preventive services discussed today that focused on making women healthier in addition to caring for them when they are sick.

I am Mike O'Dea, Executive Director of the Christus Medicus Foundation, a non-profit educational organization. Our mission is to promote and protect the presence of Christ-centered health care through active engagement in public policy and the marketplace, empowering individual right of conscience and religious liberty in daily life.

For 30 years I have been involved in caring for teenagers and adult women through Mother and Unborn Baby Care, a non-profit, which I founded in 1984; and with Casa Vitae, a home for pregnant mothers founded by my wife Peggy in 1999.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Institute of Medicine have a duty to ensure that the new health plan provides women with services which promote – not damage – their physical and emotional health.

In researching the background of the speakers here and the provisional committee members, we have found that the majority are in some way affiliated with organizations which promote providing free, confidential contraception and abortion for teenagers. This emphasis for coverage of contraception, without cost sharing of expenses, represents, yet another attempt to have the government take control of our children's health and sexuality.

With the bias of the speakers and current committee members, arguments against the inclusion of contraception were not heard.

Following are some of the reasons for excluding contraception from the list of preventive services in public and private health plans:

- **Fertility and pregnancy are healthy conditions;** not diseases to be alleviated.
- **Violation of religious liberty and individual right of conscience.** Including contraception in public and private health plans violates the right of conscience for millions of Americans who are morally opposed to these practices.
- **Undermining of parental authority.** Including contraception and abortion in health plans virtually ensures that minor girls will have access to products and procedures that are harmful to their physical and emotional health – without their parent's knowledge or consent. This is already occurring with Medicaid, the State Children's Health Plans and many employer plans. By eliminating cost sharing, it will eliminate transparency of coverage and make contraception available to all minor children, without parental involvement.
- **Contraception, sterilization and abortion damage the physical and emotional health of women.** Contraceptive use is associated with many harmful side effects and actually increases the risk of acquiring diseases and conditions such as breast cancer, heart attack, stroke, blood clots, hypertension, HIV, and STDs. In addition, contraception during the teenage years damages the ability for women to conceive and bear children later in life.

What we don't need is for the government to take over our children's health and welfare. What we do need is for HHS to establish rules and regulations that provide:

- Transparency of coverage,
- Protection of minority and parental rights,
- Religious liberty,
- Right of conscience, and
- Freedom of choice in the selection of health plans.

We urge you to balance the debate by inviting physicians, researchers and ethicists who can provide additional perspective on the many reasons for not including contraception, sterilization and abortion as preventive services for women.