

**Christus Medicus Foundation Requests that Faith Based Organizations be
Represented at the Institute of Medicine Committee Meetings for Preventive
Health Services for Women**

January 25, 2011

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Institute of Medicine have an obligation to ensure that the new health plan provides women with services which promote – not damage – their physical and emotional health. Equally important, HHS and IOM have a duty to provide the American people with a virtuous choice when selecting a health plan.

Michael O’Dea, Executive Director of the Christus Medicus Foundation had the opportunity to attend the IOM committee meetings on November 18, 2010 and January 12, 2011. Although three new members were added to the committee after the November meeting, the membership remains biased toward providing free, confidential contraception and abortion for women and teenagers.

At both meetings, the invited speakers represented organizations which advocate coverage of contraception, without cost sharing of expenses. Those organizations include the Guttmacher Institute, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, Planned Parenthood, The Kaiser Family Foundation and the Society for Family Planning.

We should note that Health Partners and the National Business Group on Health appear to be the exception. During the January meeting, they did not indicate they support a mandate for contraception. In addition, we agree with their recommendation of setting aside one percent of the total health care budget for education on preventive health services. This would be more cost effective and result in healthier lifestyles than simply mandating specific services, especially contraception.

The bias of the speakers and committee members toward mandated contraception prevented the presentation of reasons against the mandating of contraception during both the November and January meetings. Comments by anyone opposing mandated contraception were relegated to the open comment session at the end of the meetings.

As Mr. O’Dea stated in November, this represents, yet another attempt to have the government take control of our children’s health and sexuality.

Therefore it is our duty to restate the reasons for NOT including contraception as a free preventive service for women.

First, mandating inclusion of contraception in public and private health plans is a clear violation of our Constitutional right to religious liberty. It also violates individual right of conscience for millions of Americans who are morally opposed to these practices.

Second, it undermines 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.

Third, 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.

We DO NOT want the government to take over our children’s health and welfare by mandating contraception in health plans.

We DO want the freedom to provide and the freedom to choose health plans which promote virtuous choices such as abstinence and fertility awareness. Faith-based organizations have recommendations for preventive services that will more effectively manage costs and improve the health and wellbeing of adult women and adolescents.

Best practice healthcare focuses on the physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing of the whole person. This approach distinguishes faith-based healthcare from healthcare which is focused solely on physical outcomes. Genuine improvement in health requires a patient to understand and take responsibility for managing her health, as well as be actively engaged with her physician.

The Christus Medicus Foundation recommends providing a virtuous choice health plan which includes the following:

- Comprehensive Protection of Right of Conscience and Religious Liberty for Patient(s), Provider(s) and Plan(s)
- Full compliance with Preventative A & B services
- Required knowledge management, including whole person sexuality and responsibility for both men and women
- Action tracking and reporting
- Patient– physician engagement management and reward
- Spiritual, emotional and material support especially for those who are economically disadvantaged or find themselves in a healthcare crisis or an unplanned pregnancy. This will help these women make responsible choices. (Providing more contraceptive pills and devices just reinforces promiscuous behavior and eventually results in another unplanned pregnancy.)

At future IOM meetings on preventive service for women, it is imperative that faith-based organizations be represented on the Committee and be given the opportunity to provide recommendations.

If this committee is truly interested in promoting women's physical and emotional health you must establish rules and regulations that provide:

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

Again, we urge you to balance this debate by expanding committee membership to include physicians, researchers and ethicists who can represent the Faith community and provide additional perspective on the many reasons for not including contraception, sterilization and abortion as preventive services for women.

For more information please contact:

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