

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

September 23, 2011

CONTRACEPTION MANDATE ENDANGERS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

By Barbara Sella, Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns

In implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) now requires almost all private health plans to cover contraception and sterilization as “preventive services” for women.

It is deeply disturbing that at the very time when scientists and contraception advocates are beginning to acknowledge some of the dangers of artificial contraception, our government has chosen to make contraception coverage mandatory.

This past July, a new study reported on at the International AIDS Society in Rome found that women in Africa who were taking hormonal contraception (i.e., oral contraception like the Pill and injectables like Depo-Provera) were not only twice as likely to contract the AIDS virus, but were also twice as likely to transmit HIV to their uninfected partners.

It is not exactly clear why this occurs. However, evidence points to the fact that hormonal contraceptives thin the vaginal and cervical linings, thereby making the female body more susceptible to sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

This is not the first time that researchers have observed a connection between hormonal contraception and STIs. In his 2004 book, *Beyond Choice: Reproductive Freedom in the 21st Century*, Alexander Sanger – the grandson of Margaret Sanger and current chair of the International Planned Parenthood Council – acknowledged the link and concluded that he would “discourage hormonal contraception for most women” if condoms, emergency contraception, and abortion were widely available.

Our Catholic teaching rejects contraception, sterilization, and abortion. It holds that human fertility is not a disease, but rather a gift that exercised responsibly allows human beings to prosper. It teaches the transcendent truth that, in being open to new life, we can become co-creators with God.

The HHS mandate is also very troubling because it nullifies a forty-year bipartisan consensus of respect for rights of religious liberty and conscience in matters of health care. Until now, no federal law has ever required private health plans to cover these drugs. The mandate departs from our nation's longstanding practice of protecting the religious rights of all Americans – individually and collectively – to embrace and live out essential truths.

Not everyone, of course, agrees with the Church's teaching on artificial contraception. But supportive or not, every American should consider the deeper implications of this mandate. All of us should ask: How is health care advanced if the government seeks to make those who warn about the dangers of artificial contraception complicit in its compulsory coverage? How is health care advanced if the government promotes the very drugs that help spread the STIs it is trying to eradicate?

This is one important reason why religious liberty is so valuable to a democratic society. It's not just that it protects the conscience and actions of individual believers or religious institutions. It's also that it advances free and honest (even if unpopular) inquiry about what truly benefits human beings. And this is something all Americans should be able to agree on.

-30-