Dear Colleague:

Countless numbers of women overseas have been abused by family planning programs. But victims of family planning also abound in the U.S. Take the case of Norplant. Despite its sometimes extreme side effects, and the payment of $54 million to settle a class action lawsuit, Norplant manufacturer Weyeth-Ayerst (now Wyeth Pharmaceuticals) continues to deny its health risks. Moreover, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration continues to carry Norplant on its list of approved drugs and devices, as an approved substance for regulating pregnancy. Abortion groups continue to aggressively promote Norplant as a safe and effective means of contraception. And American women, deprived of full information about the health risks of Norplant, continue to suffer.

Steven W. Mosher

President

Norplant was developed and manufactured by contraception mogul Weyeth-Ayerst Laboratories (now Wyeth Pharmaceuticals) during the 1980s.

Drug trials were carried out in the developing world, first in Chile during the 1960s, then later in Thailand and elsewhere.(1) Sadly, it is cheaper to use women in the developing
world as guinea pigs, than the real thing back in the United States.

Responding to a request from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), in 1985, the World Health Organization (WHO) ignored its health risks and concluded that Norplant is an “effective... long-term method of family planning,” and the International Planned Parenthood Federation included Norplant in its arsenal of population control methods for its international affiliates. (2) It was approved by the FDA in 1991.

FDA approval of Norplant was heavily lobbied in the U.S. by Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers, and shortly after the FDA approval, pro-abortion judges and legislators attempted to mandate its use by certain individual women or minority groups of women in the U.S. (3) These attempts at domestic coercion and genocide failed, but Norplant continued to be widely promoted in the U.S. largely by withholding information about its severe health risks from the public forum. But not long after its induction into U.S. markets, American women began to report horrendous side effects, such as headaches, weight gain, and blindness.

In response, PRI launched a massive petition drive to the FDA to revoke Norplant approval and to pull Norplant from U.S. markets. Unfortunately, to this day, Norplant remains FDA approved, and Planned Parenthood continues to tout it as “one of the most effective... methods of birth control available in the U.S.”—noting little more than temporary discomfort as a potential side effect. (4)

In 1999 Norplant maker Wyeth-Ayerst agreed to pay a reported $54 million to more than 36,000 women who had sued, charging that their health had been impaired by Norplant. And on August 10, 2000, Wyeth-Ayerst issued a letter to doctors to stop inserting implants that were shipped after October 1999 with expiration dates of 2004.

While Wyeth has admitted that Norplant may be an ineffective method of contraception, it refuses to either discontinue its promotion or warn women of the risks. In fact, during a recent interview with PRI, Weyeth stated that it “was working with the FDA to get around this problem” of having manufactured “ineffective” supplies, but plans to continue promoting Norplant in the U.S. (5)

In this context, PRI received the following testimony from an American victim of Norplant:

In April, 1993, I received a Norplant implant. The doctor warned me only of mild headaches and possibly a little weight gain. Immediately after the implant, I stopped having periods. I went from 89 lbs. to 170 lbs. in 2 months. In 1994, I began having extremely bad headaches
and my vision rapidly deteriorated. Because of my deteriorating health, I had the Norplant removed. I had to be cut 4 times to find all the tubes.

I have never recovered. In 1996, I had a two-day period, then became pregnant. My daughter was born at 24 weeks because of complications. She was born with severe health problems. In 1997, I began growing hair on my stomach, back, chest and face. I also began to have problems with my heart. I’m too heavy and it’s putting strain on my heart. Today, I am a full blood diabetic.

In 1999 I started having seizures. I sometimes have 3 to 4 a day. My seizures have kept me from working, driving, or even being unsupervised for long periods of time. I’m now 28 and I haven’t had a period since 1993.

I have stomach pains and pains in my heart on a daily basis. I continue to grow hair at a fast pace. My seizures are getting worse. I don’t know what to do.

At this point, I am very weak. I have trouble walking to my mailbox or even around the yard. I have days were I can’t leave the house because the sun will give me a headache. Recently, my bladder began to leak urine into my stomach. I have scheduled an appointment for surgery.

I need help. I want to get better, and just be able to put all this behind me.

Thanks for hearing my story, and I hope you can help.

This woman’s story may be horrifying, but it is not rare. Medical experts note that hormonal contraceptives such as Norplant can cause hormonal imbalances that can cause serious side effects. There are undoubtedly many more women in America who are suffering because of present and past Norplant use.

Instead of promoting Norplant, Wyeth and Norplant promoters and distributors should be forced to continue to pay damages. And the FDA should revoke approval for Norplant.

Until then, the problem of Norplant is not going away.

Population Research Institute (PRI) is dedicated to ending human rights abuses committed in the name of “family planning.” In 1998, PRI investigators in Peru documented coercive sterilization and contraception campaigns run by then Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori. This evidence helped lead to the passage of the Tiahrt Amendment – a law designed to end U.S. support for coercive family planning programs overseas.
A key provision of the Tiahrt amendment is to inform women about the health risks associated with methods of contraception in family planning programs supported by U.S. foreign aid.

Unfortunately, throughout the process of developing methods of contraception, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is often reluctant to admit health risks, especially if American women are seen as potential consumers of contraceptive methods developed largely through experimental trials overseas.

Endnotes


2. Ibid.


5. PRI Interview with The Norplant Foundation, Weyeth Pharmaceuticals, June 14, 2002.

6. Testimony provided to PRI May 14, 2002.