

Pharmacists Take Stand Against Access to Birth Control

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Some pharmacists are choosing to exercise their moral or religious beliefs at work by refusing to fill birth control and morning-after prescriptions. This new trend is sparking a new debate over reproductive rights.

Karen L. Brauer, president of Pharmacists for Life, says her group was created to return pharmacy to a healing-only profession. Pharmacists for Life believe filling prescriptions for birth control and the morning-after pill violates the Hippocratic oath, which vows to save human lives. Brauer was fired from a Kmart pharmacy in Delhi, Ohio for refusing to fill birth control prescriptions.

Milwaukee resident Kathleen Pulz went to a local Walgreens pharmacy to get a prescription filled for the morning-after pill after her husband's condom broke. Pulz, a mother of four, decided a long time ago that she didn't want more children. When she went to get the prescription filled she was refused. Currently, there are a number of drugstores firing or disciplining their pharmacists who refuse to fill prescriptions. Large pharmacy chains like Walgreens, Wal-Mart and CVS are requiring conflicted pharmacists to report to their manager. The manager is then supposed to fill the prescription, but women's advocate groups are saying this is an unreasonable solution.

Women of color in rural areas who are refused service don't have the luxury to locate another pharmacy. They might not have enough time like Pulz to wait for their doctor who was eventually able to get her prescription filled. What are their options? Pharmacists and other medical practitioners who refuse to fill prescriptions are preventing women from accessing basic forms of healthcare. Pulz told the Washington Post, "... they should just step out of the way and not interfere with someone else's decision. It's just not right."

In December 2004, the Pharmacy Access Partnership conducted a national survey to find out whether women prefer pharmacy access to hormonal contraception. Its findings revealed that 17 to 22 million women in America ages 18-44 are likely to use pharmacy access for pills, patches, rings and emergency contraception (EC). "We also found out that women who would be served disproportionately from pharmacy access are women of color," says Belle Taylor-McGhee, Executive Director of Pharmacy Access Partnership. "It's important we do more education for all medication health providers. Any medical professional has an ethical obligation to provide medical care and should not deny care because of their personal religious or moral beliefs."

For a copy of the survey and more information about Pharmacy Access Partnership, visit: www.PharmacyAccess.org.