
Session 3

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONTRACEPTION

ETHICS IN CONTRACEPTION

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The major moral and ethical principles that should be confronted in any family planning programme relying on modern contraceptives are discussed. The withholding of modern contraception for religious and ideological reasons is questioned on ethical grounds. The case is made for the widest possible availability and accessibility to modern contraception as an individual life enricher and a good for the society.

The thorny ethical problems that arise or could arise in the development and testing of contraceptives are confronted. Whilst testing should be on a non-discriminatory basis, there could be situations calling for highly specific testing for some physiological or environmental reason; e.g. the interaction of a contraceptive with a nutritional, disease condition or some form of treatment, can only be tested in the right condition.

The coercive use of contraception whether as a legal condition or for political reasons cannot be accepted. The full informed choice of the user must be ensured at all times.

THE PREVENTION OF GYNECOLOGICAL CANCER BY CONTRACEPTION

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A shift from treatment to prevention of the three major gynecological cancers is overdue. The traditional approach to cervical, endometrial and ovarian cancers has been secondary or tertiary prevention: early detection and treatment or mitigation of damage, respectively. We reviewed the literature on these cancers to identify strategies for primary prevention. Cervical cancer behaves as a sexually transmitted disease. As with other such diseases, barrier and spermicidal contraceptives lower the risk of cervical cancer; the risk reduction approximates 50%. Combination oral contraceptives help prevent both endometrial and epithelial ovarian cancers. The risk of endometrial cancer among former pill users is reduced by about 50% and of

ovarian cancer by about 30–60%. Weight control confers strong protection against endometrial cancer. Breastfeeding and tubal sterilization also appear to protect against ovarian cancer. Although women have a range of practical, effective measures available to reduce their risk of these cancers, few are aware of them. Without this information, women cannot make fully informed decisions about their health.