

## Foreword

A meeting on “Natural Family Planning and Reproductive Health Awareness: Expanding Options and Improving Health” was held April 2–5, 1997, at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- \* review the state-of-the-art in Natural Family Planning (NFP) with an emphasis on integrating NFP into a variety of service delivery systems;
- \* provide a forum for reaching consensus on issues of importance to the NFP field with the members of the scientific community who participated in the meeting;
- \* explore issues relating to Reproductive Health Awareness;
- \* develop recommendations for future work in NFP and Reproductive Health Awareness; and
- \* prepare documents and other materials for broad distribution.

The focus of the meeting was on the role of NFP as a component of reproductive health and on expanding its availability through a variety of service delivery structures. The meeting began with a reexamination of some of the scientific bases of NFP, considering recent data on the relative likelihood of pregnancy from intercourse on different days of the cycle as well as on possible changes in fecundability and focusing on the implications of these data for NFP. Advances in technologies to predict and detect the fertile days in a woman’s menstrual cycle were reviewed. The safety of NFP as determined by multicenter case-controlled and cohort studies was presented, and factors that influence the efficacy of natural methods were examined. Models of NFP service delivery were reviewed; barriers to integrating NFP into reproductive health services were identified; and strategies for overcoming these barriers were considered. Finally, possible applications of the underlying components of NFP – self-observation and awareness, communication with partner and providers, gender concerns, and sexuality – to other reproductive health issues were discussed.

This meeting was a joint effort of the Institute for Reproductive Health, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Society for the Advancement of Contraception (SAC), and institutions and individuals who have collaborated with these organizations. All participants have been involved with the Institute for Reproductive Health in the implementation of field projects, as technical advisors, and/or as co-sponsors of activities.

SAC is delighted to have collaborated with the Institute for Reproductive Health, which is based in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Georgetown University Medical Center, and was founded in 1985, pursuant to a grant from USAID. The Institute's purpose is to improve reproductive health and the acceptability, availability, and effectiveness of NFP, with a focus on developing countries.

USAID regards family planning as a key reproductive health intervention and supports natural methods of family planning as part of its informed choice approach. SAC has long supported natural methods of family planning, featuring them prominently at recent conferences thereby ensuring a wide spectrum of family planning choices.

For purposes of the discussion at this meeting, the following definitions are key:

#### *Natural Family Planning*

Methods for planning and preventing pregnancies by observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle, with the avoidance of intercourse during the fertile phase if pregnancy is to be avoided.

World Health Organization, 1982

#### *Fertility Awareness*

Basic information and education on male and female reproductive anatomy and physiology as it relates to fertility. For a woman, this includes the ability to identify and interpret the signs, symptoms, and patterns of fertility throughout her menstrual cycle. For a man, it includes understanding his own reproductive potential. For both women and men, it contributes to their knowledge about their combined fertility at different stages throughout their lives, and to their ability to communicate about fertility issues with health providers and one another.

Institute for International Studies in Natural Family Planning, 1988

#### *Reproductive Health Awareness*

An educational approach that helps people learn to observe their own bodies, understand its normal changes, and know what is healthy and typical for them. It also helps them think about and understand socio-cultural factors including sexuality and gender issues that influence their reproductive health; to communicate appropriately with partners, health care providers, their children and parents, and others about reproductive health concerns; and to make decisions that can have a positive effect on their reproductive health.

Institute for Reproductive Health, 1997

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The following format for the meeting was adopted. A number of subjects in the field were identified to which specific questions were addressed. The papers were circulated to all participants prior to the meeting, their essence was presented and subjected to peer review by the lead discussant as well as the other participants. Consensus statements were developed and agreed upon following the discussion, and recommendations for future action were developed.

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