

Family Education Trust

(Family and Youth Concern)

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New PCT pill scheme places vulnerable young people at risk, says national family charity

21 December 2006 - For immediate release

Family Education Trust has condemned as ill-judged and grossly irresponsible plans by North Tyneside PCT to use taxpayers' money to provide children as young as 13 with free morning-after pills from local pharmacies over Christmas and on into the New Year.

Family Education Trust Director Norman Wells said:

'This new scheme is undermining the law on the age of consent and sending out the message that there is nothing wrong with underage sex. It will inevitably result in young men putting pressure on vulnerable girls to have sex by telling them that if they are worried about getting pregnant, they can always go to a local chemist the following day and get the morning-after pill free of charge.'

The scheme, dubbed 'Plan B', is part of the PCT's strategy to reduce the high number of teenage pregnancies in the region. However, a recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal* produced evidence that the morning-after pill has done nothing to reduce abortion rates in the UK, and cited ten studies worldwide showing that the availability of the morning-after pill has made no difference to pregnancy or abortion rates.

Norman Wells observed:

'It is difficult to understand how the PCT can justify such public expenditure when there is no evidence to support the idea that making the morning-after pill freely available to young teenagers in local pharmacies will make the slightest difference to teenage pregnancy rates. In fact, there is evidence that schemes like this may make matters worse by encouraging some girls to become sexually active when they might not otherwise have done so.'

Trustees: Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P (Chairman); Betty, Lady Grantchester; Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)
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The PCT insists that the morning-after pill will not be made available to children under the age of 13 because sexually active children under that age give rise to child protection concerns.

Norman Wells commented:

'It's all very well for the PCT to talk about child protection concerns surrounding 11 and 12 year-old girls, but what steps are being taken to ensure that 13-15 year-old girls who seek the morning-after pill are not being sexually abused? And how can they be sure that older girls will not be used to obtain the morning-after pill on behalf of a younger girl? The easier it becomes to obtain this drug anonymously, confidentially, and without charge, the more scope there is for abuse. The PCT also needs to give thought to how it is going to detect and treat the rising rates of sexually transmitted infections among teenagers that go hand in hand with schemes to promote the morning-after pill.'

'Given the fact that this new scheme not only flies in the face of research evidence and raises all kinds of moral and ethical issues, we hope the PCT will respect the consciences of local pharmacists who wish to distance themselves from it.'

Notes for Editors

For more on the *British Medical Journal* editorial on the failure of the morning-after pill to cut pregnancy and abortion rates, see <http://www.famyouth.org.uk/bulletin.php?number=125#morning>

Family Education Trust is an educational charity committed to promoting stable family life and the welfare of children and young people.

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