



Summer 2005 Newsletter

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Ibis Researcher Finds Many Hospitals Limit Availability of Emergency Contraception, Even for Rape Victims

Research conducted by Ibis Reproductive Health found that staff at 42% of non-Catholic hospitals and 55% of Catholic hospitals said they do not dispense emergency contraception (EC), even in cases of sexual assault. About one-third of respondents at non-Catholic and Catholic hospitals indicated that EC is available at their facility; however, various restrictions applied. For example, in some hospitals, EC was only available for victims of sexual assault, after a woman took a pregnancy test or at the discretion of the physician on duty. Among staff who reported their facilities do not provide EC, only about half gave callers a referral to another facility where EC might be available; most of the referrals did not lead to a facility where EC was available.

Study findings are reported in an early online release by the [Annals of Emergency Medicine](#) (click on "Articles in Press: Availability of Emergency Contraception: A Survey of Emergency Department Staff"). Author Teresa Harrison suggests several ways that hospitals can improve women's access to EC. These include:

- Developing collaborative agreements to enable pharmacists to dispense EC pills without a prescription.
- Developing and communicating written policies that support counseling on and provision of EC to any woman who wants to avoid an unintended pregnancy. Policies should include training of all emergency department staff on the availability, use and benefits of EC (and distinguish it from the abortion pill mifepristone).
- Making sure health care providers who have religious and ethical guidelines that prohibit provision of EC counsel their patients about all available options and provide valid and effective referrals.

"Implementing these recommendations would improve women's access to an important reproductive health product in the United States," said Harrison. The article can be accessed on the [Ibis website](#) (under "What's New" and "Publications").

Are Catholic Hospitals Complying with State EC Laws?

Catholic hospitals in the United States generally follow the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. While these directives do not explicitly prohibit the use of emergency contraception (EC), they are vague and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The most conservative interpretation would deny EC to all women, even those who have been raped. Six states currently have legislation requiring provision of information and/or EC upon request for sexual assault victims (California, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, and Washington).

Catholics for a Free Choice and Ibis Reproductive Health are assessing Catholic hospitals' compliance with EC legislation. In addition to anonymously calling hospital emergency department (ED) staff about the provision of EC, this study will include a survey of ED nurse managers

to understand hospital policy as well as interviews with rape crisis counselors to gather information about sexual assault victims' experiences at Catholic hospitals.

The overall goal of the project is to provide evidence to advocate for written EC policies in Catholic hospitals and effective communication of those policies to ED staff, thus ensuring that Catholic facilities are complying with state law and providing quality services.

Easy access to EC for sexual assault survivors is critical, therefore women in this situation need comprehensive care and treatment as well as clear and simple information about pregnancy prevention. Provision of EC should be part of hospitals' standard of care for sexual assault victims. This issue is particularly important, for women who attend religiously-affiliated institutions that prohibit provision of EC on moral grounds.

Moving Beyond Access to Increasing Knowledge and Use of EC in South Africa

Most sexually active South African women have used an effective contraceptive method, but rates of teenage and unintended pregnancies are high. Recent data indicates that 35% of women were pregnant by age 19 and 54% of pregnancies among sexually active women were unintended.¹ South African women between 15-24 years old also have the highest unintended pregnancy rate among all age groups.²

Condom use in South Africa is generally low; however, research suggests that use among sexually active women aged 15-24 may be increasing. In 1998, 17% of women in this age group reported condom use at last sex.¹ Among those in the same age group, 46% and 48% of women surveyed in 2002 and 2003/4, respectively, reported condom use at last sex.^{3,4}

Higher levels of condom use increase the need to promote emergency contraception (EC) as a backup method for unprotected intercourse or method failure. Although EC is available without a prescription and pharmacists are generally knowledgeable about the method, awareness and use of EC among South African women are low. In a study among public sector primary healthcare clients in four sites, only 23% of women 15 to 49 years old had ever heard of EC, and 9% of this subgroup had ever used EC. Similarly, 21% of adolescent mothers knew that EC exists, but many did not attempt to use the method because of misperceptions about the effectiveness and/or safety of the pills. Efforts to increase levels of awareness, particularly among young women, could potentially increase use of EC and reduce unintended pregnancy rates.

In order to stimulate efforts to raise awareness of EC, Ibis Reproductive Health and the Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit (RHRU) of the University of the Witwatersrand will co-host an EC strategy meeting among reproductive health researchers, advocates, provincial government representatives and donors in South Africa on June 2, 2005. Collaborators include the Family Planning and Reproductive Health Unit of the University of Stellenbosch, PATH, and the Population Council. The goals of the meeting are 1) to discuss innovative ways to increase public awareness of EC among women and men in South Africa (potentially focusing on getting EC messages into HIV prevention and condom promotion activities), and 2) to develop a preliminary set of activities to increase awareness of EC in South Africa. We believe this will be an interesting and productive meeting. Look for an update on the topic in the September issue of our newsletter.

[Email Ann Brown](#) for a copy of the footnotes in this article.

Ibis Fellow Presents at Feminism and Hip Hop Conference

More than 1,000 academics, students, activists, community leaders, and members of the entertainment industry gathered at the University of Chicago this past April for the first national Feminism and Hip Hop Conference. Hosted by the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University, the conference was a forum to discuss the impact of hip hop culture on the public's understanding of sexuality, race, and gender, covering a range of topics including African American women's sexuality, the construction of masculinity in hip hop culture, the visual images of women in the media, and feminist politics within hip hop activism.

The conference featured distinguished speakers such as Tricia Rose, a professor of American Studies at the University of California at Santa Cruz and author of *Longing to Tell: Black Women Talk About Sexuality and Intimacy* and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, a professor of English and Women's Studies at Spelman College in Atlanta and co-author of the recent book *Sexuality and Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* (with Johnnetta B. Cole).

Ibis fellow Kimala Price presented on the panel "Organizing Dilemmas: When Radical Feminists Come Face to Face with Hip Hop Activists," which was sponsored by the Progressive Women's Caucus (PWC), a national political network of women that emerged from the 2004 National Hip Hop Political Convention. A founding member of PWC and its principal advocate for reproductive and sexual justice, Dr. Price discussed the challenges of building consensus on a progressive political agenda with activists who come from diverse racial/ethnic and political backgrounds. The panel was well-received and attended by over 200 participants. PWC members have received several requests for interviews in the media as a result of the panel.

For more information about the conference, visit its [website](#). For more information about the Progressive Women's Caucus, [email Dr. Price](#).

Supply News Article on Ibis' MIRA Project and Cervical Barriers

Supply News, the bi-monthly newsletter of the [Reproductive Health Supply Initiative](#), features an article in its latest issue (No. 17, April/May 2005) on the role of cervical barrier methods in the fight against HIV. The newsletter is available in PDF format [here](#).

Health Disparities Among African American Women

In conjunction with National Women's Health Care Week (May 8-14, 2005), Ibis Fellow Kimala Price submitted a commentary article on health disparities among African American women, focusing on HIV/AIDS, breast and cervical cancers, as an exclusive to over 200 African American newspapers across the United States. So far, the commentary has been picked up by at least two newspapers, the *Boston Bay State Banner* and *Milwaukee Courier*. Ibis will continue to track the progress of this article. For the original commentary, please [email Ann Brown](#).

The Potential for New Cervical Barrier Methods

Teresa Harrison and Katy Backes of Ibis Reproductive Health wrote about news in the field of cervical barrier methods for the December 2004 issue of SAfAIDS News, one of the leading HIV/AIDS newsletters in southern Africa. The article highlights new information about the vulnerability of the cervix and discusses a variety of studies evaluating effectiveness and acceptability of the diaphragm and/or microbicides (topical barriers that protect against sexually transmitted infections) for HIV prevention in women. Click [here \(pdf\)](#) for the full article.

Ibis Staff Transitions

Ibis will sadly be saying goodbye to two staff members this summer: **Chelsea Polis, Assistant Researcher** and **Katy Backes, Project Manager**. Chelsea is pursuing a PhD in the Reproductive, Perinatal and Women's Health track in the Population and Family Health Sciences department at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Katy is pursuing a PhD in Health Policy at Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Good luck to you both, you will be missed!

March for Women's Lives Anniversary



April 25, 2005 marked the one year anniversary of the March for Women's Lives, the largest march on Washington in our nation's history. With over 1 million people, we made history by pledging ourselves to creating a world where no one can question our freedom to choose, our access to abortion and birth control, or our medical privacy.

Ibis Coordinates Social Science Researchers Meeting at NAF Annual Meeting

This past April, approximately 50 social science researchers, advocates and providers gathered at the Second Annual Social Scientists' Networking Meeting at the National Abortion Federation's (NAF) annual meeting.

Ibis' Social Science Fellowship program, the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF), and other researchers convened this second gathering to discuss current abortion-related social science research and its interaction with politics, policy and practice. The meeting also provided informal networking space for researchers, practitioners and advocates who often do not have such opportunities to share ideas and research in progress.

The meeting included three organized panel discussions. In the first session, Rachel Jones and Lori Frohwirth, researchers with the New York-based Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), presented preliminary results of their research on the reasons women give for having abortions entitled, "I want to give my child everything in the world: Women, Abortion and Motherhood." Rachel Roth, a Cambridge-based Ibis Fellow, served as discussant and moderator for the session.

In the second session, UCSF-based Ibis Fellow Amy Schalet discussed and sought feedback on her new collaborative qualitative research project that examines the attitudes toward sexuality that shape Americans' views on abortion and contraception. Amy also led a group discussion about the implications of the findings from her comparative research on adolescent sexuality for the work of reproductive health advocates and providers in the United States.

In the last session, Jillian Henderson, another UCSF-based Ibis Fellow, led a discussion on methodological and ethical problems apparent in a number of recently published articles aiming to prove a causal link between abortion and negative mental and physical health outcomes. Anti-choice researchers are producing a body of literature that is being used strategically in advocacy and policy campaigns to restrict access to abortion. The meeting participants discussed the influence of this research and the problems it poses for both advocates and researchers. The group brainstormed ideas to proactively respond. The session began with a brief presentation by Stanley Henshaw of AGI on the methodological shortcomings of recently published research on the purported psychological consequences of abortion.

Given the enthusiastic response from attendees, Ibis will be organizing a third gathering at NAF's annual meeting next year. Please [email Sarah Holcombe](#) with any questions or suggestions.

Upcoming Events

2nd South African AIDS Conference

June 7-10, 2005: Durban, South Africa

The South African AIDS Conference aims to marshal the best of knowledge, practice and research on HIV into further united action and implementation and to spur a new spirit of unity and accountability for all.

16th Biennial Meeting of ISSTD

July 10-13, 2005: Amsterdam, Netherlands

The aim of the International Society for Sexually Transmitted Diseases Research (ISSTD) 2005 is to provide a forum for investigators and policy makers to discuss recent advances in research and control of all STDs including HIV.

IUSSP International Population Conference

July 18-23, 2005: Tours, France

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) promotes scientific studies of demography and population-related issues.

Forum 9 Annual Meeting: "Poverty, equity and health research"

September 12-16, 2005: Mumbai, India

The program will examine research needs and gaps and evidence-based policy options. The meeting is particularly highlighting research to reduce inequities in health through effective action on the social determinants of health.

5th Biennial International Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference

October 5-8, 2005: Houghton, MI

This is the bi-annual conference of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, a professional organization comprised of researchers from the humanities and the social sciences devoted to the study of women's discursive practices across historical periods. This year's conference theme is "Affirming Diversity." Ibis Fellow Kimala Price will present a paper entitled, "What's in a Name? The Role of Metaphor in Reproductive Policy Discourse."

12th Priorities in Reproductive Health and HIV Conference partnering the 3rd South African Gender Based Violence and Health Conference

October 16-21, 2005: Spier, Stellenbosch, South Africa

This annual conference is recognized in Africa as one of the major platforms for the presentation of research undertaken in the region. The research presented ranges from findings of local and international trials, operations research, program evaluations, and qualitative studies. Topics include HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, vaccines (HPV and HIV), microbicides, barrier methods, contraception, adolescent reproductive health, maternal health, male involvement, gender and gender-based violence, traditional practices, and genital tract cancers.



Mike Keefe, *The Denver Post*, 2005

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