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Should Birth Control be Available over the Counter?

The debate for over the counter birth control is derived from the historically persistent argument over women’s rights and the usage of contraceptives. Birth control, first approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1960, has been present in the pharmaceutical industry for over 50 years. With a 99.9% rate of efficiency, relatively low cost, and low maintenance, birth control is a highly coveted form of oral contraceptive. Due to this fact, the availability of birth control over the counter has been a highly controversial topic that has been strongly debtaed for in the past few years. Currently, birth control has only been accessible with a prescription from a health care provider and through select Planned Parenthood programs. The inherently conservative Christian establishment of ideals and perspectives has been the recurring trend throughout the history of American society. However, in more recent years millennials and evolving principles have called for the development of a progressive stance on the issue. Those who argue in favor of over the counter birth control discuss how the decision would significantly increase accessibility and rates of usage, leading to a dramatic decrease in unplanned pregnancies. Arguably, other benefits of over the counter birth control include prolonged usage and decrease in overall sexual activity due to hormonal control. On the contrary, those against over the counter birth control defend the necessity for a prescription by arguing that major side effects that can be detrimental to an individual's health can be prevented with premature screening from a health care provider. Another argument given is that the availability of birth control over the counter would result in a stark increase of cost, resulting in decreased accessibility to those in poverty.

***PRO: Birth Control SHOULD be Available Over the Counter***

Many argue that birth control should remain a prescription only method of oral contraception, however there remain few viable arguments as to defend why the safe, effective, and low maintenance pill would have restricted access. Birth control has played a crucial role in the decline of unwanted and unplanned pregnancies throughout the various demographics in American society while simultaneously increasing the amount of choice and control that women have over family planning. By introducing birth control obtainable over the counter, accessibility would face a dramatic increase which would directly result in a larger percentage of women utilizing birth control as a method of contraception. By making birth control only accessible through a prescription given by a healthcare provider, accessibility is severely limited from a large portion of the population. Language barriers and additional costs directly associated with prescriptions, lack of insurance, and social stigmas are all factors that serve as barriers to a significant amount of women from obtaining birth control. These limiting factors most directly affect individuals living in impoverished communities and cities along with cultural and racial minorities. The factor that serves as the most significant barrier is the economic obstacle that women face due to the lack of viable health insurance and costs associated with prescriptions and medical examinations. Through over-the-counter birth control, many of the impediments that women face accessing birth control would be diminished due to the highly simplified process of a simple one-step transaction at a local pharmacy or supermarket.

Increased accessibility provided by over the counter birth control directly correlates with increased usage and longevity of usage. With highly accessible birth control, women regardless of economic or social class could regularly purchase and repurchase the pill whenever necessary. This would appeal to women who are not birth control to begin using it as the preferred method of contraception. In fact, 30 percent of women who aren't on the pill but would consider it if they could get it over-the-counter. (Marcotte) This is a substantial increase in usage rates that would affect a population that is either utilizing less effective methods of contraceptives or having unprotected sex without any method of contraception. Considering various other methods of pregnancy prevention such as the use of condoms and spermicides, relating birth control usage to these previously established methods would further decrease the number of unplanned pregnancies through increased encouragement for usage of products in respective conjunction with each other. Through the introduction of hormones into the body, the pill, indeed all chemical contraceptives, has as a common side effect, a reduced sex drive. (Smith) This further increases the effectiveness of birth control by reducing libido and testosterone, resulting in a decline in overall sexual activity. The Studies also show that women who get the pill without a prescription stay on the pill at least as long—and possibly longer—than women who have to get a prescription for refills. (Wahlin) Increased longevity of use is highly beneficial due because studies prove that potency and efficiency of the pill increase as time spent properly taking it with proper methods increase.

***CON: Birth Control Should continue to require a prescription***

While many have considered over-the-counter birth control to be a ginormous benefit for women all over the United States, many health specialists and researchers that are educated on the subject and the effects of birth control do not believe it is appropriate to all the medication to be that accessible to women. Many side effects and long term consequences of birth control have caused people to reconsider the idea specifically because if a woman can access birth control so easily, it places the “doctor-patient relationship” in danger (Watts). Requiring screening before giving prescriptions to the pills allows for an opportunity to explain the risks and possible effects to women who may not be aware of them. Specifically, blood clots that have resulted from the use of hormonal birth control can be predicted if a doctor screens a woman and specifically inquires into her family medical history. Extreme situations can be “catastrophic, necessitating hospital stays or months of anticoagulants” (Watts). While the worst stories and possibilities are not common and do not happen often, they are still risks to be considered that women and couples deserve to be warned and cautioned against, especially if the medical history shows that it may be a potential problem. Taking birth control has always had the possibility of side effects and health dangers, but there has always been the buffer of the doctor to interact with patients and warn them about the effects. Several studies have been conducted on the specific condition that causes blood clots and strokes and heart issues. Anna Almendrala, a journalist, studied experiments done to track women who took birth control and what the eventual outcome was, including conditions they faced later down the road. Specific birth control, newer and more recently released brands and methods, showed to be possibly more dangerous and more consequential than previous methods, even though all forms of birth control have some sorts of risks involved (Almendrala). If no screening is necessary to obtain contraceptives, not only will there be no chance to look into medical histories and records to search for the probability of future blood clotting, there also will not be an opportunity for doctors to make specific recommendation on brands or types that could best suit the patient or cause more possible risks to rise in the future. There is an obscene amount of information that is covered and discussed when a woman seeks a doctor for contraceptive prescriptions, and this is being taken away when no consultation is necessary. Women must still continue to rely on doctor opinions, recommendations, and warnings because they simply may not be as educated about their own body or health, and will never notice warning signs like their doctor will. The issues with over-the-counter hormonal birth control even go past the obvious health issues that come with it. There have been several economic disadvantages and flaws that have studied and brought to light, including the possibility that allowing the medication to become over-the-counter will result in women choosing inexpensive and ineffective birth control methods, with no doctor warning or recommendation. In terms of effective birth control, the options women would have could potentially be less than what is available under the Affordable Care Act (Gueren).There has also been research to suggest that prices of contraceptives could even increase once they are made over-the-counter, taking away the idea that non-prescription birth control is so beneficial to all women because it allows for easier access, especially by women in the lower classes.

***Personal Beliefs of Person A***

Every woman in the United States should have the ability to control her body and family planning, regardless of a cultural or economic situation. I believe that by implementing the sale of over-the-counter birth control, individual choice increases due to increased accessibility. I know of several cases where over the counter contraceptives have been the only option for the individuals. This is primarily due to the lack of accessibility to a certified healthcare provider to obtain a prescription along with the lack of monetary funds. While those defending prescription birth control advocate that over-the-counter birth control would increase the price point of the pills, the monetary issue in obtaining birth control lies in seeing a certified healthcare provider rather than the cost of the birth control pills. Those who cannot afford health insurance are paying over twice the amount that they would be paying if the process of obtaining a prescription was eliminated from the process. The argument that birth control causes health issues due to family history has validity, however the majority of contraceptives already available over the counter have health risks as well. Each product included warning labels that are supposed to be read prior to usage, and individuals are aware of their individual health concerns and history therefore can prevent improper usage. In regard to individual health issues due to the use of birth control, cases of medical emergencies and major side effects are extremely rare and can be seen from any use of medication regardless of their prescription or over the counter origin. I know an individual who was exposed to the more dangerous and unreliable forms of contraceptives such as the “morning-after pill”. She utilized these methods solely on their easy accessibility in a local drug store, and the major side effects of improper usage took their toll when she developed ovarian cysts that significantly impeded on her ability to have children. This is representative that all oral contraceptives have side affects, but when used responsibly and correctly, birth control would provide women with a low-risk and effective method of pregnancy prevention. Women seeking contraceptives are sexually active individuals well aware of the costs and risks of unprotected sex. These responsible members of society are capable of protecting their individual health with knowledge of their respective history, and through responsible actions and decisions can prevent issues originating from birth control usage while simultaneously having control over their individual bodies.

***Personal Beliefs of Person B***

While it is important to allow women to have access to birth control, a required before process must be put in place to protect the health of women. I have known many friends and relatives that have suffered from the effects of birth control because they were not warned enough about the possibilities of harm to them specifically because of the warning signals in their medical history. I have also known friends that have avoided these problems and issues because they trusted their doctor’s recommendation concerning specific methods and brands of contraceptives that fit their preferences and medical profile. It is true that use of contraceptives can increase if the prescription is not needed, and possibly help prevent more unwanted pregnancies, but the health issues associated are not worth the accessibility, especially for the lower class women who may not have the means to pay for expenses that can accompany medical issues such as blood clotting and hospital stays. Additionally, if the main purpose behind taking away the requirement of a consultation with a medical professional is to benefit women that live in impoverished areas, it can be expected that taking away the requirement will hold other unintended consequences for women in lower income families. Women who are not educated on the dangers of specific methods or brands may choose the cheapest or most ineffective type, which will not help them reduce unwanted side effects or pregnancies. While birth control is an impressive innovation and technology for the people of our generation, we must remain wary of it because it is not perfected or without risks. Advocates for taking away the prescription process do include educated doctors and specialists because birth control itself is not dangerous and because resulting conditions from the use of birth control are very rare, but the risks drop so dramatically with just a simple consultation. I would place an individual’s health above easy accessibility in every scenario, especially because when sickness is a result of of the use of contraceptives, it is often extreme and life-threatening. The health of young women must continue to be a priority, even if the chances remain low for harm. When the statistics are applied to someone’s daughter or mother or sister, the choice of birth control requiring a screening beforehand seems easy.

***Reconciliation/Negotiation***

The topic of over-the-counter birth control has become a highly controversial one over the past decade, with both sides containing valid points. Neither side offers a perfect solution, however, and so that must remain the focus of conversation, instead of allowing the debate to continue with no real amicable end in sight. Concerns and key issues can be taken from both sides to work towards an alternate compromise with a better solution that all can agree upon, even though small concession would have to be made in order to reach a satisfactory resolve. Because women from impoverished areas seem to be the concern for those who would like to make birth-control over-the-counter, focus should shift to a conversation of how more opportunities can be made affordable to allow these lower classes to have access to time with medical professionals to give them the same advice and cautioning to any other patient. Another factor to be considered is simply campaigning to bring the issue to attention to women that they must be informed and educated about their own medical history and profile. With improvements in widespread knowledge about the effects of birth control and programs to consider that will allow women to have access to consultation, the need for increased accessibility drops and becomes less important. Another considerable answer would be to allow birth control to be over-the-counter, but place other smaller requirements on either the consumer woman or the producing company. Federal requirements for companies to plainly state the dangers their contraceptives can produce on the box or bottle can not only allow women to judge and weigh the options at the pharmacy, but it can possibly spur companies to work towards safer and better formulas that will come with less side effects so they would not have to admit to the downsides of their product. Progress and health will always remain a balancing act when it comes to new advances in medicine. People wish for more solutions and cures and innovations to aid conditions and make life easier, but new advances rarely have no risks attached. Until the focus changes from debate to collaboration, safe progress will not be made.

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