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## TODAY'S HEALTH OR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

### PHARMACIST PRESCRIBED CONTRACEPTION

First of all this article is not intended to berate the fine profession of Pharmacy. I have relatives and friends who are pharmacists and without a doubt our local pharmacists are some of the best professionals I have ever encountered. When the general public is asked to rank trustworthiness, only the clergy are rated higher. BUT, there is now a huge issue before us concerning contraception. Oral contraception ("the pill") has been in use for over 50 years and as the effective dosage has lowered the safety has increased. The pill has given women control over their reproductive health and teenage pregnancy rates have dropped as well as abortions since contraception has become widely available and at a reasonable cost. In New York, the pill must be prescribed by a licensed physician, nurse practitioner, midwife or physician assistant at an office, a Family Planning Clinic or at Planned Parenthood. As part of the visit for the prescription a physical exam is performed to be sure of no illness or conditions that would warrant a different method. Women who are obese, have diabetes and/or high blood pressure, cancer, a history of abnormal blood clotting or who smoke would best be advised of a different methodology. Classically at the time of the pelvic exam a pap smear is performed which simply is a screening and diagnostic tool for cervical cancer—prior to pap smears only diagnosed in late non treatable stages. Now cervical cancer is becoming rare because of the diagnosis of pre cancerous lesions and also due to the advent of human papilloma virus (causative agent of 90% of cervical cancers). However, there are still many unplanned pregnancies for reasons that range from financial disincentives, transportation issues, and embarrassment about having an intimate examination. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is actively advocating for the ability of a woman to go to the drug store and to purchase the pill "over the counter" without as much as a blood pressure check. Of note, 73% of physicians disagree because they have personal experience in detecting illnesses that would be worsened by the pill and they can also write an encyclical about tumors, benign or malignant that would have gone undetected had not the patient presented for a pill appointment. There is a large push to convince women to have a yearly "well woman" exam whether it is for contraception or not. This week California passed a law so that girls and women can pick up hormonal contraception without first visiting a physician. In order to prescribe under this law the pharmacist must ask a patient to complete a health questionnaire and then consult with the patient about the most appropriate form of birth control and in some cases must take a patient's blood pressure. It is unclear if the pharmacists who are generally overworked even want to take this on. There is accountability and liability in prescribing and/or advising medications and this new law does not exonerate the pharmacist. There are reasons why some medications are by prescription only. Today even some nasal decongestants are locked up. It is a widely held view that if aspirin were to be released as a new drug today it would be by prescription because of its anticlotting properties. Once again it is time to get legislators out of the patients' bedrooms and out of our offices—not to meddle in the sacred doctor patient relationship and to let the hard working, highly competent pharmacists do the job that they were trained for.