

POLICY & PRACTICE

EC Mandate

New legislation would require the Department of Justice to include emergency contraception as part of its first national medical guidelines for treating sexual assault victims. The Justice Department has come under fire for failing to include emergency contraceptives in its National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examination. Reps. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), Chris Shays (R-Conn.), Diane E. Watson (D-Calif.) and James R. Langevin (D-R.I.) introduced the "Best Help for Rape Victims Act" (H.R. 1214) last month.

The bill would require the Justice Department to include language in the protocol stating that a victim of sexual assault should be offered information about emergency contraception and should be provided with it on site if requested. "It is unthinkable that a national protocol to treat victims of sexual assault would not require health practitioners to provide a full understanding of the risks they face and treatment options," Rep. Shays said. "Rape victims deserve to be fully informed of all their options and this bill would ensure they get that respect."

Cancer Awareness Campaign

Members of Congress are trying to raise awareness of gynecologic cancers by reintroducing legislation to create a national public awareness campaign aimed at early detection. "Johanna's Law: The Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of 2005" (H.R. 1245) would authorize the Health and Human Services secretary to spend \$15 million over 3 years on a campaign intended to encourage women to talk to their physicians about their risk for gynecologic cancers. The bill also calls for demonstration grants for outreach and education. "Through awareness and early detection, we help women beat gynecologic

cancers," said Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.), one of the sponsors. "This legislation will help women across the nation understand the symptoms to be on the lookout for and the steps to take if they need care." The bill was first introduced in November 2003.

U.N. Calls for Cloning Ban

The United Nations General Assembly is calling on member countries to prohibit all forms of human cloning. The nonbinding declaration also asks countries to "adopt all measures necessary to protect adequately human life in the application of life sciences." The declaration, sponsored by Honduras, received support from the United States. The National Right to Life Committee called the move a significant step and called on Congress to pass legislation to ban the cloning and destruction of human embryos. But the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, which supports what it calls therapeutic cloning, said the declaration was "toothless." "Since the declaration is unenforceable by law, countries will continue to pursue therapeutic cloning research which seeks to develop stem cells to cure some of life's most debilitating diseases," said the coalition's president, Daniel Perry.

Medical Records Fight

Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri has asked the Kansas Supreme Court to keep the state's attorney general from obtaining the medical records of abortion patients. Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline has been seeking the records as part of an effort to investigate "child rape and potential illegal late-term abortions." But Planned Parenthood officials say it's important to protect patients' identities and medical information not relevant to the investigation. "It's simply wrong to expect any doctor to turn over the medical records of dozens of patients based on the hunch—or the hope—of the attorney general that he may find evidence of crimes," said Peter Brownlie, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri. Mr. Kline said the records were sought because of probable cause that a crime had been committed and said he has offered to have the court remove identifying information before handing records over to his office.

Conflict-of-Interest Rules Targeted

People with direct financial conflicts of interest should not serve on Food and Drug Administration advisory committees, a coalition of public interest groups has recommended. Financial conflicts undermine "the public's faith in the fairness and credibility of the panel's work," the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the National Women's Health Network, the U.S. Cochrane Center Consumer Coalition, and eight other groups said in a letter to Acting FDA Commissioner Lester Crawford, D.V.M. They cited the FDA advisory committees that reviewed the safety of cyclooxygenase-2 inhibitors, noting 10 of the 32 members had direct financial conflicts. In addition to prohibiting scientists, physicians, and clinicians with conflicts from serving on such committees, the groups said people with industry ties should make up no more than half of a committee.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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