

POLICY & PRACTICE

Grading the Cervical Cancer Fight

Most U.S. states have improved their efforts to eliminate cervical cancer, but state officials are still missing critical screening opportunities, according to Women in Government's second annual report, "The 'State' of Cervical Cancer Prevention in America." A total of 20 states and the District of Columbia improved their grades over last year but no state received an "excellent" grade, according to the report. The assessment is based on data concerning screening rates, rates of uninsured women, public insurance coverage of ad-

vanced screening technology, and legislative focus on the issue. "Our country has made significant progress in the effort to eliminate cervical cancer," Women in Government President Susan Crosby said in a statement. "However, our findings still show that too many women remain unscreened or underscreened for cervical cancer and too many screening programs rely on the Pap test alone, while [a Food and Drug Administration-approved] test for the human papillomavirus, the cause of cervical cancer, is available and can better identify women needing interven-

tion." The report is available online at www.womeningovernment.org/prevention.

Revisiting Parental Notice on Abortion

The U.S. Supreme Court has returned to the lower court a case involving New Hampshire's law requiring parental notification prior to an abortion. *Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England* was sent back to the lower court so the court could reconsider its original decision that the parental notification law is unconstitutional because it does not include an exception to allow an abortion in a medical emergency without parental

notification. The Supreme Court, in a unanimous opinion, instructed the lower court to consider the legislative intent of the statute and determine if the court could prohibit the unconstitutional application of the law without striking it down completely. Both supporters and opponents of abortion rights claimed victory for their sides. The Center for Reproductive Rights called the decision a "recognition of its precedent that abortion laws must protect women's health and safety." The group said it expects that the lower court will strike down the law entirely. But the Christian Medical Association praised the decision and said they hoped that the lower court upon reconsideration would reaffirm the law.

Youth Health Trends Brighten

Health trends among adolescents and young adults appear to be improving, Claire Brindis, Dr.P.H., codirector of the Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy at the University of California, San Francisco, reported during a National Institute for Health Care Management conference. Pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates decreased over the past decade among adolescents and young adults, although sexual activity remains prevalent among teenagers. In 2003, 45% of high school girls reported that they had had sexual intercourse, 11% with four or more partners.

Minority Women and HIV/AIDS

Federal officials need to take a closer look at the growing rates of HIV infection among minority women in the United States, women's health advocates said at a Capitol Hill briefing last month. The rates of HIV infection among women of color are disproportionate to the population. For example, African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander women represent about 29% of the U.S. female population, but account for 84% of female AIDS cases, according to the Society for Women's Health Research and Women's Policy Inc., one sponsor of the briefing. More information about HIV/AIDS and sexual health should be directed toward women and girls, including comprehensive sex education in schools and increased health services for immigrants, the speakers said. In addition, more funding is needed to improve the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

Infertility Treatment Coverage Sought

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association is renewing its call for increased insurance coverage for medically necessary infertility treatment. Currently, only 15 U.S. states offer some level of insurance reimbursement for infertility treatment and many patients cannot afford treatments, according to Joseph C. Isaacs, president of RESOLVE. The group discourages the acquisition of prescription medicines from sources other than pharmaceutical distributors licensed by the Food and Drug Administration. "The real crime here is that millions of American women and men are denied the opportunity to have a family because insurance companies are unwilling to cover treatment," Mr. Isaacs said in a statement.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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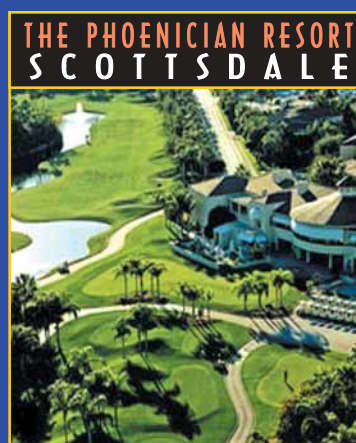
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