

# Smart Sex

by Yvonne DeGraw

**At Texas A&M, 73.6 percent of the male students say they have been sexually active, and 56.9 percent of the female students say they have willingly had intercourse, according to two studies done by the psychology department last year.**

**Yet many students remain largely misinformed or uninformed about birth control and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.**

The media teaches us a lot about sex. Most of it is wrong. It tells us the right breath mint or shampoo will hook the most attractive man or woman. If you believe that, I have a ski chalet in Florida to sell to you.

Often, the media says sex has no consequences. If you believe that, I have a nice condo in peaceful, downtown Beirut for you.

Rarely does the media teach how to be skillful at sex.

Skill at sex has several meanings. This article isn't about the one you were just thinking of.

Instead, this is about responsibility — knowing enough about sex and caring enough about your partner to avoid surprises like unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

In this context, "skillful sex" means being able to talk to your partner about birth control knowledgeably and tactfully.

**R**esponsibility doesn't just mean taking the pill. It's also important to know what common drugs can make it ineffective. Responsibility isn't just carrying a condom around; it's knowing that the heat from storing it in a wallet can weaken the material.

While debate rages over whether sex education should be taught to school children, almost everyone agrees that college students should have ready access to information about sex.

Locally, two common sources of birth control information for Texas A&M students are the A.P. Beutel Health Center and Planned Parenthood.

At the health center on the College Station campus, the birth control information provided is limited.

If a woman asks for such information at the center, the nurses say they give her a brochure titled "A Guide to The Methods of Contraception" published by Ortho Pharmaceutical Corporation, a maker of the pill.

The brochure tells about six types of contraception — oral contraceptives (the pill), intrauterine devices, diaphragms, vaginal spermicides, condoms and the rhythm method. It tells how each method works and the effectiveness of each type, but instead of mentioning possible side effects, it refers patients to their doctors.

Rosa Scandarnai, a registered nurse at the health center, says the nurses and doctors give further information to women who ask for it.

"Girls have more alternatives than they think they do," she says. "If they just call up, we'll be happy to give them information."

Dr. Claude Goswick, health center director, says the center provides pap smears to check for diseases and prescriptions for birth control pills. The doctors will also write prescriptions for IUDs and diaphragms, but these prescriptions can't be filled in the health center's pharmacy.

The lab fee for pap smears is \$13 at the health center. Prices for birth control pills may vary by brand, but one popular type costs \$5 for the first month and \$3 for each subsequent month.

Goswick says the pill is the most commonly requested form of birth control.

"Usually by the time they (students) get here, they've gotten some information," he says. "They know what they want by then."

Goswick says his opinion that female students should have their contraceptive needs met by a family physician is well-known.

At one point, Goswick had the health center stop giving gynecological exams because he felt the health center fee each student pays shouldn't cover routine physical examinations. Because of protests, the center reinstated cervical exams, which are now available until 2:30 p.m. each weekday.

Goswick says he is glad to see a swing toward the use of condoms. He says condoms are the only form of birth control that also protect against a range of sexually transmitted diseases. He says he expects the rates of sexually transmitted diseases to drop because the fear of AIDS is making people more cautious.

Condoms have been shown to help protect against the spread of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. In addition, laboratory tests have shown that a chemical found in some spermicides kills the AIDS virus.

Although Goswick encourages the use of condoms, the health center doesn't provide them.

"It's not the kind of thing we should get into under the present circumstances," he says.

**T**he interior of the Brazos County Planned Parenthood clinic suggests a commitment to informing those who enter the waiting room.

One wall is a literature rack filled with brochures on a variety of topics. A series of flyers called "It Takes Facts" explains how to use five types of contraceptives. "Problem Pregnancy Alternatives" talks about the choices a pregnant woman can make. Contrary to the opinion of some, Planned Parenthood does suggest marriage, single parenthood and adoption as well as abortion as alternatives. Other brochures cover "Cancer Facts for Men," "Sexually Transmitted Diseases" and "Will my Drinking Hurt my Baby?"

Sally Miller, who has been director of the clinic at 303 College Main for 10 years, says every woman who wants a form of birth control is given a large brochure called "Facts About Methods of Contraception." It explains how seven types of birth control work, their main advantages, possible problems, effectiveness, who can use them and warning signals in a handy table format.

Miller says almost 89 percent of the people who get contraceptives at her clinic choose the pill. The reason for this, she says, is its effectiveness and convenience.

Oral contraceptives are theoretically 99.6 percent effective, she says. The actual rate is lowered because some women forget to take the pills regularly.

Also, many women who use the pill don't know about the long list of medications that can, *in some cases*, make the pill ineffective.

The list of medications that possibly interfere with the pill includes antibiotics like penicillin, ampicillin, tetracycline and rifampicin; all antacids; all anticoagulants; insulin; tuberculosis medications; anti-convulsives like barbituates; cholesterol lowering agents; sedatives and hypnotics; some anti-migraine preparations and some anti-hypertensive agents.

Women who want to know if a drug they are taking could interfere with the pill should consult a physician, she says.

While many possible side effects are mentioned in relation to use of the pill, smokers face the greatest danger. After the age of 30, death rates among women who take the pill and smoke rise dramatically.

Another reason for the large number of women who use the pill, Miller says, is that many people think of it as the only option.

"They either are not aware or just don't think about the variety of methods of birth control," she says.

Planned Parenthood is currently encouraging the use of condoms.

"What I tell everybody is, 'Be on a primary method of birth