

It is axiomatic that in the evaluation of any medication its risks must be carefully weighed against its benefits. The essential step toward this end is the determination of the risks involved. In the case of the oral contraceptives, this critical determination remains incomplete with respect to the problem of a potential carcinogenic effect in the breast and uterus. Apparently the F.D.A. agrees that a demonstrable carcinogenic effect in the breast and uterus of test animals connotes some hazard for women and on this basis clinical trials with both Ethyneron and Neonovum have been discontinued. This step indicates an acceptance of the view that animal data have direct pertinence to the cancer problem in women.

In view of such an inherent risk, the special benefits of the pill as compared with the benefits of other contraceptives becomes an over-riding consideration. The essential benefit to be obtained from any contraceptive is the prevention of an undesired pregnancy. Such a benefit means so many different things to so many different people in so many different life situations that any universal denial or affirmation of the pill's special benefit for any or all potential consumers would be untenable. However, in view of the general availability of somewhat less effective but even more feasible alternative methods of contraception, readily supplementable by the surgical interruption of unaverted pregnancies by qualified physicians, I can visualize only a rare circumstance indeed in which I would recommend estrogen-progestagen mixtures for contraceptive use.

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