

of the pill. Whereas a year ago 72% of their patients desiring contraception were using the pill, the present level was about 65%, a drop of 7%. The survey indicates, however, that almost all those who have discontinued the pill have gone to other methods of contraception.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH, INC.
806, 116 S. MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILL. 60603

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Since the Subcommittee on Small Business, chaired by Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, began hearings on "The Pill," sensational headlines have appeared in newspapers across the country and physicians have been busy handling inquiries from concerned women on the subject of oral contraception.

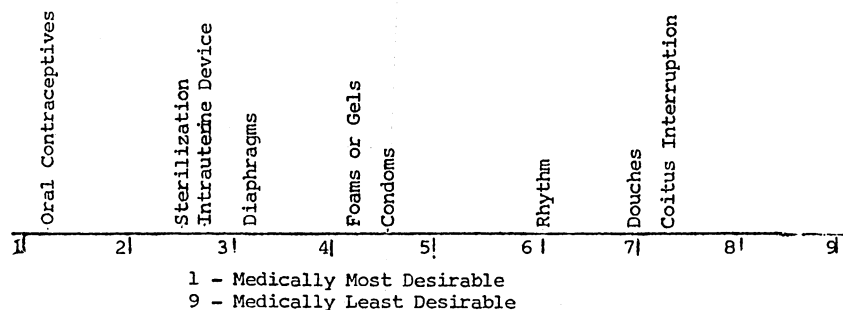
In addition, statements have appeared recently in the public press on the effect of the news reports emanating from the Hearings. Many statements have indicated that a significant percentage of users of oral contraceptives were sufficiently worried to discontinue this method of fertility control.

At the North American Conference on Fertility and Sterility held in late February at Dorado, Puerto Rico, clinicians were again warned that there were possible adverse effects from the use of The Pill, such as amenorrhea, infertility, and electroencephalographic changes. On the other hand, they frequently cited the lack of objective evidence for cause and effect relationships between The Pill and certain alleged side effects, pointing out that in many cases impressions are being taken as facts. All of these events are of serious concern to the practicing physician.

At the February executive meeting of the American Association for Maternal and Child Health, it was decided that the practicing obstetrician/gynecologist could make a valuable contribution to knowledge in this area. Accordingly, the Board of Directors asked the Association's executive secretary, Harold J. Fishbein, to conduct a survey among the approximately 13,000 obstetrician/gynecologists to determine their attitudes and recommendations concerning birth control methods. There was a high interest in the aims of the survey, and over one fourth of the physicians replied to the lengthy questionnaire.

Summarizing the responses, 3,240 (97%) physicians believe oral contraceptives are medically acceptable; 61 (2%) believe they are not, and 51 (1%) are undecided. This vote of confidence for The Pill is the result of a careful balancing of the risks and benefits involved. The survey asked physicians to rank contraceptive modalities, considering pregnancy risk, general user health, and patient convenience. The results of the process appear below: oral contraceptives, with a ranking of 1.6 on a scale of 1 to 9 (where 1 indicates high desirability and 9 indicates low preference), are still the preferred method of birth control. Next, with a ranking of 2.7, was sterilization, followed by the intrauterine devices at 3.0.

PHYSICIAN RANKINGS OF BIRTH CONTROL METHODS



Though practicing physicians continue to endorse oral contraceptive use, many women have reacted to the recent publicity about the safety of The Pill. Obstetrician/gynecologists report that new patients asking for oral contraceptives have declined by 20% since the recent publicity. Further, established patients using oral contraceptives asking about safety tripled in the same period. Usually these patients are just seeking reassurance. After a discussion with their physician