

On September 13, 1968, Robert Metz reported in his "Market Place" column in *The New York Times*:

Those swinging birth control pill stocks were off pace again yesterday as a rumor got around that there might be a relationship between The Pill and uterine cancer. . . .

The rumor evidently stemmed from discussions at a closed meeting of the American Cancer Society regarding research projects that are in an early stage of development.

This was by no means the first time that Wall Street received possibly crucial information about The Pill, among other potent drugs, well ahead of doctors and patients. But I was unaware of this report when, on the morning it appeared, I went to Cherry Hill, New Jersey, on a tip that reports on studies of cervical cancer and The Pill were to be made at a meeting of scientists sponsored by the Cancer Society. No announcement of the meeting had been made and it was, I found, closed. Indeed, I was urged to leave. During a coffee break, one scientist expressed to me a fear that disclosure of the material under discussion might panic the women of America. No concern was expressed that, in a sense, a large number of women may have been "panicked" into using The Pill on the basis of a misplaced confidence that its safety had been established. After the meeting, I tried but failed to interview Drs. Myron R. Melamed and Hilliard Dubrow about a study—financially aided by the taxpayers through grants from the Public Health Service—done co-operatively by Planned Parenthood of New York City and Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital. Despite the lack of co-operation and even hostility—the Cancer Society's Dr. Jack Milder told me I had overstayed my welcome—I was able to piece together a story reporting that a higher incidence of cervical cancer had been found in many thousands of women on The Pill, but that there were serious questions about whether the higher incidence did or did not mean anything. This was essentially the conclusion of the FDA's Advisory Committee when, on November 1, 1968, it reviewed the incomplete, unpublished Melamed-Dubrow data and issued a statement saying that they neither confirm nor refute a cause-effect relation with cervical cancer. At the very least, a finding from the data that a causal relation had *not* been refuted was troubling. Yet the *Times* not only did not report the FDA statement, but also, on December 12, carried a story by Miss Brody which was, once again, marked by a lopsided emphasis: "There have also been a number of scare reports linking the pill to increased risk of cancer, especially cervical cancer, but none have been substantiated."

For years, informed scientists have been concerned about use of The Pill in physically immature girls, because it may prevent them from attaining their full height. Late in 1966, when the Food and Drug Administration announced a new, uniform labeling for all brands of The Pill, it warned that in such girls The Pill "should be used judiciously." In April, 1967, FDA Commissioner Goddard repeated the warning in the speech to Planned Parenthood physicians. Almost simultaneously, in its "Freedom from Fear" cover story, *Time* told about a really with-it mother who "announced that she was already slipping The Pill into her daughter's breakfast milk." *Time* did not bother to point out that by law and good medical practice, The Pill is supposed to be *individually prescribed*.²

Thirteen months later—on May 2, 1968—Dr. Louis M. Hellman, the FDA consultant, told a *Today* television audience, "I would not hesitate a bit in prescribing pills for teen-agers." He went on, incredibly, to have this exchange:

Barbara Walters: Would you prescribe The Pill to a girl who is a virgin?

Dr. Hellman: Well, I think if my daughter were a virgin and came to me as a teenager and we could talk about these things, yes, I'd prescribe The Pill for her.

² In another area of error, *Time* cited the "latest" report of Dr. John C. Cobb to demonstrate successful use of The Pill in Pakistan. Three weeks later, however, he said in a speech in Denver that The Pill, while "moderately successful for a very few selected women," was "not practical. . . . Something more than contraception was needed." The speech was cited in the winter, 1968, *Child and Family*.