

A 21-year-old came to me with her father. She was pregnant. She did not want to be pregnant, but she also did not want an abortion.

At age 15, after a high school football game, a young woman was raped. In college, she went on birth control pills and had intercourse with 10 to 12 fellow students often after binge drinking. She took her pills perfectly and was also good at using condoms as well. She was one semester short of graduating and was working in a restaurant. The bar tender and she decided to go to his apartment to have sex. She was not just a little bit drunk, she was very drunk and so was he. She saw a condom on the bedside table, but had no idea whether they used it. She asked about that the next morning but got an evasive answer from the guy. It was the day before she was expecting her ovulation. She was not on pills for this one act of intercourse because the college health service could not provide students with contraception unless they were full time active students.

She was late for her next period. Both she and her close friend, another woman, had clear opinions about abortion. In both of their minds, abortion was murder. They went together to a problem pregnancy counseling center. That wasn't really what it was. All they did was do a pregnancy test to confirm she was pregnant and sternly discourage her from getting an abortion. She never told anyone in her family she was pregnant. Toward the end of the first trimester, her mother saw in her pocketbook a letter from her aunt (her mother's sister) and she opened it and read it. It said that the daughter could come down to Florida and have her baby there. Some way to for a mom to find out her daughter was pregnant. Her mom suggested that she would help her get an abortion which infuriated her still further. Her father came to see me with her at Grady and here is what happened:

First, she spoke to Maxine Keel and I spoke to the dad, informing him I was not about to try to talk her into an abortion. Second, Maxine spoke to dad and I spoke to the daughter. The only thing I knew to do was encourage her to stop drinking because of the fetal alcohol syndrome; to get prenatal vitamins and folic acid; and that she needed to start seeing a doctor about her pregnancy. When she got home she read up about the fetal alcohol syndrome and decided she would have an abortion.

Where was the counseling in the "problem pregnancy counseling" operation? She was an excellent contraception, used condoms to prevent infections and just had had unprotected sex once from age 15 to 21. She thinks that they probably did not use a condom.

NOTES:

"I will never forget how they made me feel."

Maya Angelou taught us, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

In the same vein, I will never forget how the women, and occasionally men, I was privileged to see over five decades made me feel. Let me give you some examples:

1 "You know Dr. Hatcher, Grady has not been integrated yet."

Those of us who were addicted to Downton Abbey, heard the phrase, "Life is the acquisition of memories." Here is one of mine. I was very frustrated trying to treat the health problems of massively obese women and men during my internship year (1963-1964). I asked them to return to a little classroom each Wednesday as a group. My frustration turned to joy as most of my "heavies" lost a lot of weight. My message was, "There are no tricks to losing weight, you have eat less and exercise more."

The Atlanta Constitution heard about it and came to Grady to photograph it. And there was Robert Jinks holding out the front of the pants he wore 164 lbs ago. Ms. Dorothy Costello, the stern head nurse for all of Grady (all of us were a bit afraid of her), came to me the next week and said, "I saw the photos in the paper. You know, Dr. Hatcher, Grady has not been integrated yet." I was afraid she would make me stop seeing black and white patients together. She let me continue knowing that Grady emergency rooms were about to be integrated in several months.

How did I feel? You know how I felt - simply wonderful at the weight my group had lost and at the prospect of the integration of our hospital in the near future!

2 "Dr. Phillips did my sterilization operation."

I gave a lecture in Greenville, SC. A nurse practitioner told me about one of her patients who had two friends that had become pregnant following tubal ligation procedures. In a rather pompous, arrogant and dismissive manner, her doctor told her, "If I do your sterilization procedure you will NOT become pregnant." After 10 years, what percentage of women who have had a tubal sterilization procedure have become pregnant?

About 18 months later she was well into her third trimester of pregnancy and she had a t-shirt made inscribed with the words "Dr. Phillips did my tubal sterilization."

I still laugh with her about her approach to her doctor today!

3 She really, really did not want to become pregnant

One morning I saw a woman in her early thirties, who also had two friends who had become pregnant following tubal sterilization procedures. She was intent on avoiding an unwanted pregnancy. She had a tubal sterilization procedure done, took combined birth control pills, practiced withdrawal, and then her husband put on a condom. They returned to vaginal intercourse. She was still concerned some sperm might have gotten into her vagina because she did not practice withdrawal soon enough. In addition to all the above she came to our clinic asking for emergency contraceptive pills!!! I tried not to laugh and did give her ECPs.

WOW!!! One serious woman... and man. I asked her if would like to run our family planning program.



4

A smoker no more

I saw one woman just three times, she smoked lots. I encouraged her to stop. I told her of my parents. Both of their deaths were hastened by heavy smoking. I remember the tears that came to my eyes and to hers as we thought about what smoking had done to people we loved. I saw her a second time and we had much the same discussion.

She returned to the clinic seven years later and asked the staff at the registration desk if she could see the doctor who took the time to encourage her to stop smoking. When she came into my office, she told me she had stopped smoking completely.

Did I feel great!

5

She almost died from a second blood clot

A 25 year old mother of four was hospitalized in another city with a deep vein thrombosis. She left the hospital with clear instructions to never take birth control pills. Four years later she was admitted to Grady with a massive pulmonary embolus. An 11 inch clot was removed from her pulmonary artery. She lived!

I became all the more committed to teaching women the pill danger signals. Take a guess who encouraged me to develop a mnemonic to teach women and their clinicians the pill danger signals.

Estrogenic contraceptives can lead to serious complications and even to death. Teaching women the early warning signals may save the life of a women using pills, patches or rings.

Women using estrogenic birth control pills, patches or rings should know the "A - C - H - E - S" warning signals. These are the first letters of the symptoms she should watch out for.



Pill, Patch and Ring Warning Signals

Abdominal pain - Blood clot in pelvis, liver or mesentric vein

Chest pain - Blood clot in lungs, cough, cough up blood, shoulder pain or pain down arm, fatigue, shortness of breath, flu-like symptoms or heart attack

Headaches - Severe pain, visual problems, numbness or weakness in an extremity

Eye problems - retinal vein thrombosis, tunnel vision, partial or complete loss of vision

Severe leg pain - Swelling, heat, redness or tenderness in lower leg or thigh

Return quickly to your doctor or nurse practitioner if you develop one of these!
Whenever seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner be sure to tell her or him what contraceptive you are using.

6

Five children, many rats and pregnant with an IUD in place.

My third or fourth patient one morning in 1969 was a distraught mother of 5 children. In spite of her Lippes Loop, her pregnancy test was positive. She was sobbing. Soon there were tears in my eyes too. So this was a completely unwanted pregnancy four years before *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* legalized abortion in the United States. My patient had another serious problem, rats also lived in her apartment and occasionally they would bite her children lying in bed. She had found public housing where there would be no rats at all. But there was an important stipulation, she could have not more than 5 children to be eligible to live in that apartment.

I know exactly what I did. I went out into the hall and said to the Junior League volunteer helping us in the clinic, "J_, I am going to give \$100. I want you to give \$100. There is a physician in public health who will give \$100. And we will send this woman to the Emory Clergyman's Counseling Service where they will arrange for her to go to Mexico and have a safe abortion."

I was actually not so much an advocate for abortion until this case. I was still conflicted about abortion.

So how did this case make me feel? It made me feel that I had to take action. And today, 48 years later, it makes me ask one person after the next, would you not want to have this woman be able to obtain a safe legal abortion?

7

Twenty living children, but opposed to birth control on religious grounds

There were six wonderful women helping high risk woman to use contraceptives or sterilization at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. They presented a case of a woman with 20 living children who was totally opposed to contraception or sterilization. They had tried many approaches, but this women simply did not want to use birth control.

It did not take me too long before I suggested "You know we say that family planning is a completely voluntary program and this means that we should probably cease and desist from trying to talk this person into using contraception."

8

If we don't ask, they won't tell! What did I fail to ask her repeatedly?

An 18 year-old was referred to me by a nurse practitioner at her college. She had been seen repeatedly for vaginal infections. Nothing was working. This happened within a year of the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. I saw this person at least 20 times from the early 80's to the early 90's. By the time she graduated college she had had intercourse with over 100 men. Rarely did she use a condom, in spite of my fervent recommendations. I treated her for every STI in the book. One weekend she was traveling up east with 4 fellow students because her college was in the round of 16 of March Madness. She said she would be having intercourse with all of these guys and she did not like it that she had a discharge that had a bad odor. I told her then and over and over again that she had to use condoms and was risking the possibility of chronic pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility and chronic pain.

When she graduated from college, she immediately was hired and started receiving a high salary (within 3 to 4 years it was today's equivalent of \$300,000). Then she went up east to a prestigious business school. I saw her the summer after her first year. She was going to parties and having sex with complete strangers, but still using condoms infrequently. I begged her to use condoms. After her second year in Boston, I saw her and she said to me, "You would be proud of me, Dr. Hatcher, this past year I had sex only 4 times with what you would call dangerous men (men who were strangers and yet with whom she did not use a condom)."

I thought to myself, "If she were my daughter, how might a clinician at her college health service approach her were she having sex so dangerously?" I asked my patient, "Why are you doing this to yourself?" Her response was so clear. Her response was, "Maybe it is because I drink too much." I had failed to ask her about her use of alcohol or other drugs over the course of a decade and 20 visits. By this time I was 52 and I had been in Alcoholics Anonymous for 3 years, which I told her. She ultimately did stop drinking completely. She was unable to become pregnant.

I did not handle this patient too well, did I? I am sad when I think about her today. But you know, I have asked groups of 20 to 500 people like you here today what she said when asked why she was doing this to herself. Often no one in the group correctly suggested that alcohol was her problem.

9

Way out in the country

Let me tell you about a 19-year old. I really don't think the answer to her reproductive health needs lies in pills, condoms or IUDs. Here's how she wrote out her problem for me:

"I've never ever enjoyed sex. Not even now with this guy I like a lot. The first time I had sex I was raped by a boy in the neighborhood. He took me to the hospital to see my mama. Then on the way home he drove out in the country. He started making passes. He got real fresh. I started to cry. He told me he would leave me way out there in the country if I didn't give in. It was dark. I still see him in my neighborhood. I hate him. Every time I have sex with my boyfriend it hurts a lot. I guess I keep doing it to please my boyfriend."

Sex is a problem area for this person. Not a cause of pleasure. Not an activity leading to greater self-respect. Not an area where this 19-year-old feels comfortable at all. She needs to be able to talk to someone about the occasion she was violated and about her subsequent sexual experiences.

What a sad story. For the past 10 years, I have volunteered at a program called **Fight Abuse In The Home** and the abuse women receive from men saddens me each week.

NOTES: