

## American Medicine Accepts Birth Control

**T**HE history of human progress as well as the history of medicine will record a decisive victory on June 8th, 1937, when the American Medical Association gave its first official recognition to birth control as a legitimate part of medical practice. While the Association met in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for its eighty-eighth annual assembly, its House of Delegates, sometimes called "the supreme court of American medicine," adopted unanimously the report of the Association's Committee to Study Contraceptive Practices. This report included constructive recommendations destined to extend both the reliability and the availability of contraceptive knowledge in the United States.

For years American medicine's recognition of birth control has been delayed and bitterly fought by powerful groups, religious and otherwise, within its own ranks. All resolutions on the matter were shelved until two years ago, when the Association appointed its Committee to Study Contraceptive Practices. Last June the Committee presented a preliminary report which in no way appeared to forecast the overwhelming acceptance to come this year.

The four recommendations adopted touch upon the progress of contraception in law, research, education and clinical service. They are as follows:

1. "That the American Medical Association take such action as may be necessary to make clear to physicians their legal rights in relation to the use of contraceptives.

2. "That the American Medical Association undertake the investigation of materials, devices and meth-

ods recommended or employed for the prevention of conception, with a view to determining physiologic, chemical and biologic properties and effects, and that the results of such investigations be published for the information of the medical profession.

3. "That the Council on Medical Education and Hospitals of the American Medical Association be requested to promote through instruction in our medical schools with respect to the various factors pertaining to fertility and sterility, due attention being paid to their positive as well as to their negative aspects.

4. "All dispensaries, clinics and similar establishments where information and advice concerning the prevention of conception are given to the public should be under legal licensure and supervision and under medical control."

Medical responsibility to extend birth control knowledge to all economic groups was recognized by the

Committee when it reported, "Information concerning contraception is admittedly available to persons in favorable economic circumstances. There appears to be no law to prevent physicians who work in dispensaries from furnishing patients there with any information that may lawfully be furnished to patients in any other economic group. In all cases, the legal justification is the medical need of the patient."

After reviewing the recent decision of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, the Committee gave the following opinion concerning the decision's effect upon state laws: "Although the statutes in force

### COMMENTS OF THE PRESS

**"The action marks another landmark in the annals of American medicine."**

—New York Times, June 9th

**"The birth control policy adopted by the Association means far more than contraception. . . . It was a recognition of a change in biological thinking, based on many advances in knowledge of the human body, mind and spirit."**

—Associated Press dispatch, June 9th

**"The new policy is, of course, a monumental victory for birth control. It is the capture of a stronghold which hitherto looked impregnable. We believe in the long run it will be counted as a milestone of progress toward a healthier and better country. Not the least beneficiary, however, should be the medical profession itself, which makes an important adjustment to the world around it and steps out with a clearer integrity."**

—Editorial "Medicine Looks Up"  
New York World-Telegram, June 10th

in the several states that forbid the dissemination of information concerning methods for the prevention of conception do not in express terms exempt physicians from their operation, it seems fair nevertheless to assume that the state courts, if called on to construe them, will adopt lines of reasoning similar to those followed in the case cited and in other cases decided by United States courts, leaving physicians free to give information concerning contraception when required to meet the medical needs of patients."

The Committee also declared, "It is recognized that voluntary family limitation is dependent largely on the judgment and wishes of individual parents. The intelligent, voluntary spacing of pregnancies may be desirable for the health and general well being of mothers and children."

That "laymen assisted by the law" have blazed the road for medical advance in contraception was stated in a resolution of the American Neurological Association, submitted to the American Medical Association before action was taken on the birth control question. This resolution urged the Association to "consider

seriously the inroads that are being made on the prestige of organized medicine by the rapid advance of popular thought in the matter of social medical science, as evinced by the success of lay organizations in carrying out their program for greater freedom in the matter of contraception."

In a statement to the press released June 10th, Dr. Clarence Cook Little, president of the American Birth Control League, hailed the Association's action as "enlightened leadership." He predicted that the program adopted by the Association "will reduce America's high maternal death rate and protect the public against dangerous frauds."

Dr. Little stated, "The American Birth Control League, whose policies are set by the National Medical Council on Birth Control, has always held that birth control is primarily a medical problem and should be guided by the medical profession. We are happy to see our stand confirmed by the American Medical Association. This step undoubtedly indicates that the medical profession is conscious of its powerful position in influencing the course of progressive social change."

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**AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE**

501 Madison Avenue

New York City