

contrast, in tissue cultures in which this antiserum is not used, within three days the myelin is attacked and eventually destroyed by the lymph cells.

The Pill for Teens

In Baltimore, where 1,000 illegitimate children are born every year, Sinai Hospital is trying to stem the tide of unwanted babies. Physicians give contraceptive pills to "sexually active," unmarried girls under 16, who otherwise, a screening board agrees, are almost sure to have out-of-wedlock babies.

During the last four months, 60 young women have begun taking the pills. All had their parents' consent. The program is expected to inspire others like it.

But objections to this experimental program are coming from the powerful House Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations. Its chairman, Representative L. H. Fountain (D-N.C.), challenges the program on grounds of the health and safety of the girls. "Birth control pills were never meant to be given to children," a spokesman for Fountain says.

Specifically, Fountain charges, physicians who prescribe oral contraceptives for young girls ignore Food and Drug administration guidelines. FDA requires a statement on all oral contraceptive labels saying that the pills "should be used judiciously in young patients in whom bone growth is not complete."

Ever since the advent of oral contraceptives, scientists have known that the estrogens or female hormones in the pills can cause the ends of bones to stop their growth prematurely.

Animals studies show a relationship between estrogens and bone growth, Dr. George Langmuir of the Planned Parenthood Federation, New York, says, but clinical studies have not been made to any significant degree. According to Dr. Langmuir, pediatric endocrinologists—specialists in the behavior of hormones in children—think birth control pills pose only very minor hazard to girls in their early teens.

By the time most girls are 13, a considerable amount of their skeletal development has been reached. It is nearly complete by 16, Dr. Langmuir explains. Therefore, chances of growth being cut down much are slim.

The feeling among specialists is that any risk is certainly balanced by the benefit to girls who would otherwise almost certainly become pregnant.

Physicians at Sinai Hospital believe it is quite safe to prescribe oral contraceptives for girls under 16 and do not plan to abandon their program.

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