

Contribution to the Indications for the Prevention of Pregnancy

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The practitioner is often confronted with the difficult and sometimes delicate question of objective and scientific indication for prevention of pregnancy. As is the case with artificial interruption of pregnancy, this field of prevention offers absolute and relative indications.

Tuberculosis tops the list of absolute conditions making prevention imperative. It is well known that a tuberculosis state is made worse through pregnancy, that a latent condition may become active. Decided improvement will be noticed in tuberculosis if pregnancy is interrupted, and cases may even become entirely cured. It is of paramount importance that people be examined also for this disease before they contract marriage. Many dark hours may thus be spared young married people. Absolute indications for the prevention of pregnancy are likewise conditions of the heart (mitral stenosis, myocarditis, recurrent endocarditis, etc.), and acute and chronic nephritis. Mayet also includes syphilis, tabes, paranoia, and deaf-mutism in this group. In all such cases, it is our duty to prevent pregnancy permanently with all the means at our disposal, and for a certain time in those cases which have hopes of cure.

While these absolute indications permit of no two ways of treatment, the relative indications for prevention tax the judgment of the practitioner to the utmost.

I do not wish to debate concerning the interests of the state which tries to elevate the number of births at all costs and with all possible means, nor concerning the ideas of Malthus. I just wish to bring forward conditions and facts with which every observing and human doctor is familiar and which he will heartily approve. Everyone will agree that those jogged-out women who have children in rapid succession, need a longer period of rest, even if there are no strict clinical indications. Clara Bender observed rightly when she said before the "Silesian Society of Home Culture:" "Biologic mass manifestations cannot be met with categorical imperative." A law is necessary which is flexible, respecting those changes between social and medical indications which are practically realized.

Whereas medicine did not approve of the measures of Neo-Malthusianism heretofore, physicians accept to-day the social necessity for the use of contraceptive measures and under circumstances to perform operative sterilization. Sometimes, it is not only the doctor's right but his duty to prevent pregnancy. The physician must be guided by his conscience and the sense of duty whether or not, in a given case, the number of children should be curbed. He knows that hundreds of mothers spend their health and happiness almost yearly, sacrifices which are hardly warranted. He who believes in the higher purpose of life, will not tolerate that the sum of pain and sacrifice will outweigh what joy life has to offer. For troubles and distress are, in the long run, destructive and deadly to life.

Law making for the protection of the mother should maintain that each birth must be a reward to humanity and state. If more than half of all normal and timely born children die at an early age (not to mention the abortions), the mere number of births would represent an unnecessary sacrifice, and willful curtailment of posterity would be a healthful and a moral obligation which does not suffer if even the ego were the main motive.

The economic side of this question likewise deserves consideration. The eternal need and sorrow which keeps the family down during the incessant

ascent and decline of the offspring, is enough to paralyze the creative power and to stunt development and independence. The purposeful admission of a rest period for mothers of families enables us to improve the social position and condition of many, to elevate the moral and economic independence and thus exert an influence of better understanding among all humanity.

Miss Hacker claims in "Society for Social Medicine, Hygiene and Medical Statistics" (Session held February 27, 1908) that the movement towards restriction of conception has started and cannot be stopped. It would be better if the medical profession took the lead instead of giving it into the hands of charlatans. Hamburger asserted that there is no better way of reducing the mortality of children in Germany than the diminutions of the number of conceptions.

Mayet calls the poor social status of the unmarried mother even a relative indication for contraceptive methods.

Once the indication is clear, the physician is confronted with a new question of what means should be employed to prevent pregnancy. That interrupted coitus is harmful to both the male and female organs, is evident. Condoms and other devices at our disposal are unreliable. The occlusive pessary, being fairly dependable, offers the disadvantage that it has to be removed before each menstruation and then must be reinserted by a physician. Women do not like to subject themselves to such methods. Vaginal douches with disinfecting materials are uncertain especially if they are taken in the squatting posture, which is mostly the case.

The request and expressed need for a safe and easily usable preparation, and marked developments of chemical industry caused many new products to appear on the market and to be advertised in professional and other publications. In practice, many of these prove ineffective and are, therefore, not indicated. Even the physician is thereby put in an embarrassing position, as is needless to say.

I, myself, have often been consulted as to safe contraceptives. Just then the scientific papers of Dr. Mueller, Dr. Kossmann, Dr. Werner, Dr. Herold, etc., fell into my hands, in which the authors described their long experience with the "Patentex" preparation,* and brought out its safe and harmless action. Add to this the biological experiments of Dr. Hirsch, who brought spermatozoa mixtures in contact with "Patentex" and observed after a few minutes macroscopically and with the microscope a coagulation and loss of mobility of these spermatozoa. Besides its deadly action upon the spermatozoa, "Patentex" has the property of adhering to the walls of the female genital organs, and it is neither toxic nor thermolabile. It has, in a word, all the qualities which we have a right to demand of a contraceptive.

*Manufactured by Chemische Exportgesellschaft Vauka G.m.b.H., Frankfurt-on-Main (Germany), and Vauka Chemical Works, Inc., 345-9 Sixth Ave., Newark, N. J., U. S. A.