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Contraceptives

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ceptive is the same as having an abortion.

University offers Plan B

Shortly after the introduction of the "morning-after pill," women were given the option to use emergency contraceptives after having unprotected sexual intercourse. The first method used in the United States was developed in 1974 and consisted of administering birth-control pills in high dosages after a woman forgot to use contraception or had her method of contraception fail. This method, still used by some doctors today, was dubbed the "morning-after pill." But like the medications used today, the pills can be taken up to 72 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse.

Today, there are drugs that will work with just one pill, or sometimes a series of pills, that are manufactured specifically for emergency contraception purposes.

Colleen Jones, a women's health nurse practitioner at the University Health Center, said the health center offers the brand Plan B, which contains the hormone progesterin, to anyone who has had unprotected sex within 72 hours of a visit. The drug is paid for by Planned Parenthood's Family Planning Expansion Program, which provides students with free pelvic exams and free contraceptives.

Jones said emergency contraceptives are not pills that will induce an abortion.

"Emergency contraception will not terminate a pregnancy," Jones said. "If a woman thinks she's pregnant, it's already too late to take the contraception."

Right to Life Chairwoman Lori Eckstine disagrees. She said any time a life is conceived, whether it has implanted in the womb or not, it is considered a life. Taking emergency contraceptives is therefore an abortion, she said.

"From the moment of conception, your eye color, hair color — everything about you — has already been determined," Eckstine said. "All that is needed is time and nutrition for a life to grow."

Right to Life is a Catholic anti-abortion organization that is opposed to all forms of emergency contraception because, as Eckstine said, the pills are taken after conception has occurred.

"Whether or not the fertilized egg would have naturally implanted or not cannot be determined before the drug is taken," Eckstine said.

A political and moral issue
Diane Duke, Planned Parenthood's associate executive director, said there are a lot of misconceptions about what emergency contraception is, and because of that, it's turned into a political issue.

She said some pharmacists will not fill prescriptions for emergency contraceptives because they believe, as does the Right to Life group, that the drugs are in fact abortive devices.

Wal-Mart has been threatened with boycotts from pro-choice groups after its May 1999 decision not to carry Preven, an emergency contraception kit that includes a pregnancy test and a series of pills. Wal-Mart spokeswoman Jessica Moser said the decision is not because of moral or political reasons, but because of customers' demands.

"The main factor certain groups have been attacking us on is the moral factor," Moser said. "Our customers do not have a problem with us not carrying Preven."

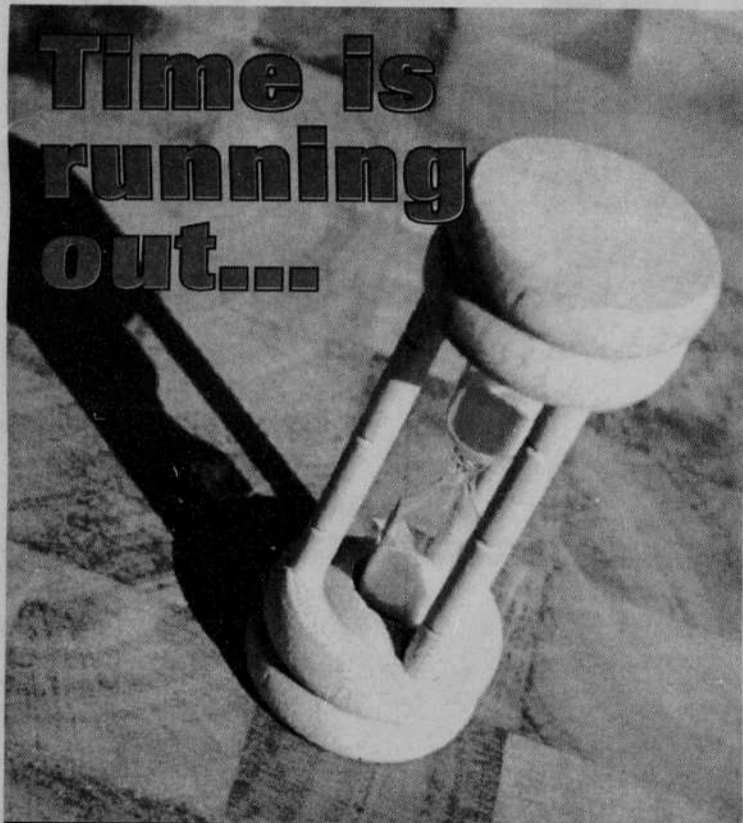
Moser also said that Wal-Mart, which runs one of the nation's leading community pharmacies, still fills prescriptions for other forms of emergency contraceptives, such as the method using high dosages of birth-control pills.

"We make all our decisions based on what's best for our business," Moser said. "Morality has nothing to do with it."

Brian Terrett, director of public relations for Sacred Heart Medical Center, said the hospital's emergency room will give emergency contraceptives to sexual assault and incest victims within 72 hours after the assault, as long as they are not already pregnant. The emergency room will not give the contraceptives to those who are not victims.

"We only give the contraceptives to those who are victims because that is our hospital policy," Terrett said. He also said the policy was probably devised this way because the hospital is Catholic-owned and operated.

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