A.85/S.892 (Paulin/Krueger)

AN ACT to amend the education law, the insurance law and the public health law, in relation to providing for dispensing emergency contraception under certain circumstances

The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) supports the above-referenced legislative proposal which would allow professional nurses and licensed pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception pills and would extend prescribing rights to midwives, from licensed physicians and certified nurse practitioners.

Expanding dispensing and prescribing rights would reduce some of the barriers to EC. Some women face difficulties when needing to schedule an immediate appointment with a doctor. Others are restricted by not having proof-of-age at point-of-purchase. Making emergency contraception more easily available will have important health benefits, improve women’s health, prevent unwanted pregnancies and reduce abortions in New York State.

Oral contraceptives are among the safest medications used in the United States. Emergency contraception (EC), which contains a higher dose of the same medications used in standard birth control pills, has been found to be safe and effective for use as a post-coital emergency contraception. When used within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, it is 88% effective in preventing pregnancy. As with other oral contraceptives, EC can only be dispensed with a prescription. Within the last several years, several states (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington) have allowed pharmacists to prescribe EC to women of any age, including those who are too young to purchase EC over-the-counter, using clear and specific protocols. Their experience has demonstrated the safety of this approach.

Reproductive health is an essential component of women’s health. Nearly half of all pregnancies in New York State are unintended. Unintended pregnancies often have detrimental, long-term effects on a woman and child’s health. Unintended pregnancies are frequently terminated, and when carried to term, are less likely to have adequate prenatal care.

EC does not replace other methods of family planning. NYSACHO does not recommend EC as a method for family planning, and will continue to support other programs that reduce unintended pregnancies and promote healthy children and families. However, in a state where over 153,110 abortions are performed each year, giving women another, more easily available and less costly alternative is a clear improvement to public health.

2/8/12 Assembly Health, Ways and Means
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