Birth Control: U.S. Programs Off to Slow Start

Nearly 18 months ago, John Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, issued a long-awaited policy statement on birth control, pledging his department to increased attention to questions of population dynamics, fertility, sterility and family planning. Henceforth, he said, HEW would "support, on request, health programs making family planning information and services available."

Behind the promulgation of the memorandum was the fact that, while birth control technology had been more or less easily adopted by middle-class America, it was relatively unknown among the poor. With rising evidence that birth control could play a leading role in reducing poverty, crime, and infant mortality and that local governments and voluntary agencies did not have sufficient resources to do the job, the case for federal action became increasingly clear. But while the political skittishness that long hobbled such efforts may be a thing of the past, a year and a half after the pronunciamento it appears that effective federal programs to supply contraceptives to couples who need them are still in the future. For, despite the fanfare, family planning activities in the Johnson administration are off to an exceedingly slow start.

Just how slow is a bit difficult to estimate because the family planning projects of HEW—the government's chosen instrument in this field—are wrapped up in the department's broader health and welfare programs and are not easy to isolate. In administrative terms alone, the underpinning for an active program does not yet exist. The official family planning staff consists of one newly appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population and Science; he has no supporting staff and, it is estimated, spends only about 10 percent of his time on population affairs. A number of individuals in various agencies spend some of their time on birth control, a variety of departmental committees and task forces have been appointed, and a series of regional conferences have been held to acquaint state and locally based health and welfare officials with the fact of HEW's new interest. But on the practical side little has been achieved. One unit of the Department—the Welfare Administration—now includes family planning services under its Maternal and Infant Care and Maternal and Child Health programs, but these are far from universally available, and the total amount of money provided for them appears to have been no more than a few million dollars. The Public Health Service which was expected to be more or less the central vehicle of department policy, is spending a lot of money on research—most of it through the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development—but it has not yet begun to play an operational role.

Outside HEW about 58 family planning projects are funded by the poverty program. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) got into the birth control business rather by accident when it was discovered that many communities were using the flexible funds awarded under the Community Action Program to provide such services. But with last year's congressional attack on the budget for community action, the OEO programs faced serious cutbacks and, while OEO has dredged up the money to re-fund all its current programs, the likelihood of its getting sufficient money to fund all the projects now on the docket does not appear to be great.

When it is all added up—allowing for the fact that virtually all the participants and observers come up with somewhat different figures—the much-heralded departure in federal policy appears to have affected the lives of only a few hundred thousand women at most, and the budget totals no more than a few million dollars. In terms of HEW alone, it is a long way from the $20-million program the Department said last year it planned to initiate.

The leaderless and leisurely pace of departmental efforts is now the focus of serious attention on Capitol Hill, where interest in birth control has been steadily growing, and among population lobbyists such as Planned Parenthood. In both quarters there have been increasing questions about whether HEW is going about its business in a sensible way.

A "Partnership for Health"?

Last year, under the influence of the Johnson administration's romance with the concept of "creative federalism," HEW proposed and got through Congress legislation known as the "Partnership for Health" program, or the Comprehensive Health Services Act. Under that program, which is just coming into effect, the old practice of channeling Public Health Service support for state and local health activities through categorical grants—for example, for tuberculosis or venereal disease—was dropped. Instead, the PHS will now give grants to the states in comprehensive, unearmarked form. The theory is both that it will encourage the development of local health services that are themelves "comprehensive"—not segregated by category of illness—and that it is desirable for the states to use their own initiative, set their own priorities, and define and respond to their own needs.

The question of how to fund family planning arose at about the same time the Comprehensive Health Services program was being discussed. Under a bill introduced in the Senate by Joseph Tydings (D–Md.), specific funds would have been allocated for birth control support. Tydings worked with the generally accepted figures that about 5 million medically indigent women need assistance and that it costs about $20 to supply one woman with contraceptives for 1 year. A satisfactory program could therefore be calculated to cost about $100 million. Tydings proposed to reach that figure in stages, with federal expenditures beginning at $20 million the first year and rising to $75 million in 5 years; the remaining funds he proposed to obtain from state and local matching sources.

The Tydings approach was opposed by the administration on the grounds that unearmarked funds could be made available to the states by the route of the new Partnership for Health program. In a letter to Tydings, Wilbur Cohen, Undersecretary of HEW, said that the department planned to spend $20 million under that program in fiscal year 1968, $25 million in fiscal

Birth Control "Cost-Effectiveness"

While millions of women who could use birth-control services remain without them, evidence is piling up that family planning is not just a matter of convenience to its recipients but a matter which gets to the heart of two of America's greatest social embarrassments—poverty and infant mortality.

A study conducted by OEO's research department has concluded—using one of Washington's favorite current measurements—that birth control is probably the single most "cost-effective" antipoverty measure available. A comparative study by the Public Health Service of various ways to reduce infant mortality concluded that a major birth control program funded at $90 million for 5 years was not only the most cost-effective way to deal with infant mortality but would produce results at a rate of effectiveness seven times higher than the next most effective program, complete maternity care. The president of Planned Parenthood—World Population, Alan F. Guttmacher, recently told a congressional committee that, in a maternal and infant care program in Chicago which included family planning, "among 14,380 infants born in census tracts served by the program in 1965, the infant mortality rate was 34.5 while in similar low-income census tracts not included . . . the rate was 57.5." These figures of course relate to the general fact that the mothers were receiving overall care as well as to the fact that having fewer babies—and having them better spaced—is apt to contribute to both maternal and child health.

1969, and $30 million in fiscal 1970. In addition, he pointed out that money would also be available under Title 19 of the Social Security Act ("medicaid"), and under the maternal health programs of the Welfare Administration. Tydings was persuaded to withdraw his bill.

Unfortunately, from that point on, things did not by any means go as the department had anticipated. Instead of the approximately $270.5 million authorization it had requested for the program—a sum that was approved by the Senate—the authorization for fiscal year 1968, after cuts by the House and a House-Senate conference, was only $125 million. Of that, about $110 million was needed to support ongoing commitments, leaving only around $15 million free to meet a variety of demands—of which family planning would be only one.

Critics have raised the question of whether HEW was acting in good faith when it sent off the letter to Tydings—a question that turns on precisely when the department got word of the House action. But whether or not the letter was sent in good faith, the gap between the department's announced intentions and its performance has left a residue of ill feeling and disappointment among the family planning partisans who were persuaded to go along with the department's plans. Tydings, in any event, has reintroduced his bill with an array of support ranging from conservatives such as Robert Byrd (D–W.Va.) and Bourke Hickenlooper (R–Iowa) to liberals such as Ralph Yarborough (D–Tex.), Charles Percy (R–Ill.), and Joseph Clark (D–Pa.). It appears possible that a serious effort will be made to get an earmarked program going.

What has to be said about the idea of comprehensive funding is that, like many other good principles, it has not yet been tried. Government health officials offer a variety of arguments in favor of the plan. Their first arguments are medical. The basic conviction is that, particularly in the era of the pill and the loop, contraception is very much a medical and not simply a mechanical matter; they believe that women using these methods should have continuous medical attention. Second, present leaders of HEW are committed to the idea of health services that are comprehensive, not fragmented—to reducing specialization in care, not encouraging it. They want contraceptive care to be part of a larger sequence of maternal and infant care, and they believe that, with comprehensive funding, they can encourage local health programs to develop in this fashion. They believe that specialized clinics which handle only contraception miss the larger opportunity to reach out into the other health problems of the individual being treated, and, beyond the individual, to the problems of her family.

The preference for comprehensive funding also has a political aspect: HEW fears that, if the funds are earmarked in one place, Congress might refuse to appropriate the money for continuation of developing programs under other auspices, such as those of the Welfare Administration. Finally HEW officials believe that, if only the money would come through—and they are seeking to increase the authorization—comprehensive funding would be a better vehicle for strengthening state health departments.

"Batteries of Bureaucrats"

Last year a great many politicians interested in family planning were willing to go along with these arguments; now they are reevaluating their position. Tydings' own explanation of the delay in getting federal programs started, offered in a Senate speech last month, rests almost entirely on the question of funding. "In the competition for funds appropriated generally for health programs," he said, "family planning programs are at a considerable disadvantage. They are relatively new and involve only a few staff people. By contrast," he continued, "the older, firmly established health programs have batteries of bureaucrats who are committed advocates. Family planning programs are ignored because they lack advocates within the bureaucracy of the Federal Government. The Congressional mandate for family planning programs will be carried out only if the Congress appropriates funds which can be used solely for such purposes. We tried the other way in the 89th Congress and we have found that the Executive branch has completely let us down."

HEW officials concede that there is a good deal of truth to this charge, not only with respect to their own bureaucracy but also with respect to the workings of local health departments. But they also point to other omens—high attendance at their family planning conferences; scores of inquiries; and a recent survey of state and territorial health officers which indicated that a large number of them rank family planning highest among their priorities for health programs. To which the response of HEW's critics is this is fine, but if they are put off with fancy rhetoric and not given the practical support they need, their initiative will die and their interests will be diverted to other matters. At this writing neither HEW officials nor their critics are too doctrinaire on the subject of how to fund family planning; the major difference is that the administration still believes the comprehensive approach will work—although officials admit there is scanty evidence for this view—and the others feel it has already been tried and found wanting.

In a slightly different sense the argument about earmarking of funds is also surfacing with respect to the poverty program. The analogue to HEW's belief in comprehensive health programs is OEO's belief in unified community action activities. The OEO believes that family-planning money appropriated in a community-action context helps strengthen local agencies, and that it may help build other organizations among the poor, such as welfare-rights groups. The popular family-planning program also helps to preserve the unpopular OEO, which is constantly threatened with dismemberment. If both OEO and HEW ended up with earmarked family planning programs (and a bill roughly analogous to the Tydings plan for HEW has been introduced in the House, directed at OEO), it would be only a matter of time before someone suggested putting them together. And the logical home for such a joint program would be HEW. Aside from further weakening the poverty program, such a move might easily have an unfortunate effect on family planning, because OEO, in its comparatively spontaneous and unbureaucratic fashion, is by far the more enterprising, innovative, and responsive of the two agencies. What would happen if its programs got mired down in the much more cautious and slow-moving Public Health Service is not a prospect that enthusiasts of strong federal action enjoy contemplating.—ELINOR LANGER

France: First the Bomb, Then the "Plan Calcul"

Paris. The appointment last September of Robert Galley as *délégué à l'informatique* was confirmation, if any were needed, that the French government is in earnest about its announced intention to promote a viable national computer industry.

Galley is a technocrat rather than a politician. In a decade of responsible posts with France's atomic energy authority he has earned the reputation of being France's leading talent in the organization of large scientific and technical enterprises. The French atomic energy program has been a top-priority effort, and observers feel that Galley would not have taken the new job without assurance of the same sort of support.

Informatique is a coined word with no direct equivalent in English, although "information sciences" comes fairly close. The French didn't have a word for the techniques of logical and automatic handling of information, and *informatique* has been gaining currency in recent years. (To the man in the street, *informatique* denotes everything related to computers and to their design, manufacture, and use.) In France, defenders of the language stoutly resist neologisms, but they prefer domestic barbarisms to foreign ones, and *informatique* appears to have completed its period of probation now that it is used officially in Galley's title.

To the interested public, Galley is known as the administrator of the government's new "Plan Calcul," which is a frank effort to bring the French computer industry to within competitive distance of American firms and their overseas subsidiaries. The French never lacked appreciation of the importance of computers to science and industry, but their new push is prompted by political aspirations as well as scientific and economic considerations. President de Gaulle's conception of national independence (*Science*, 5 May) requires a French national computer industry.

Precipitating factors in the government's decision to intervene were the state of the French computer industry, symptomatized in 1964 by the acquisition of half ownership of the biggest independent French company, Machines Bull, by American General Electric, and a U.S. government embargo on delivery of American giant computers. Grounds for the embargo were that such computers could abet French nuclear-weapons development, and that delivery should be forbidden under the nondissemination provisions of the Moscow Test Ban Treaty.

The wrangle lasted for 2 years, ending last October when the lifting of the ban on export licenses was announced. Some observers believe that the row contributed to the French decision to withdraw selectively from NATO. While this is questionable, the incident may well help to account for the abruptness with which U.S. forces were given their walking papers.

Details are not easy to come by, but it seems that by early 1965 French scientists were familiar with the specifications of the new IBM 360-92, and high-energy-physics research teams, projecting their requirements 3 or more years ahead, wanted the machine. The French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) ordered two of the big IBM machines and also two CDC 6600's, the type CERN contracted for. The obvious capacity of these machines for doing calculations relevant to nuclear weapons development raised the question of conflict with the test-ban treaty, and the embargo was levied.

Security on the French nuclear-weapons development program has been tight, but it was assumed that the big computers could help French military scientists in their efforts to improve the weight-to-yield ratio of atomic warheads as well as in the development of thermonuclear weapons. Friction between the two countries was most severe during 1966 as the need for the computers became more pronounced. One of the ironies of the situation was that French physicists planned to use the big computer in cooperative experiments with Soviet physicists at Serpukhov.

Accommodation on the issue was reached when the French for the first