

Medically Inaccurate Information about Contraception and STIs

NPCVF's 2010 report determined that a total of nineteen CPCs gave medically inaccurate information about contraception, and a total of fourteen told investigators unfounded statements about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In addition, twenty-two CPCs told investigators that they did not provide or refer for birth control, citing the following reasons:

HIV can pass through a condom.¹

The AIDS virus is smaller than the holes in condoms.²

NPCVF's 2013 investigative update reveals that this pattern of misinformation about STIs, contraception, and birth control has not subsided. Eight of Virginia's CPCs provided inaccurate information about contraception and STI's in-person and over the phone. Furthermore, sixteen investigators received inaccurate information through CPCs' websites, and two investigators received inaccurate information by way of literature. Investigators relayed the following experiences:

"[The CPC] told me that condoms were only 75-85% effective, and that the pill was even lower than that and to just not consider it.³

Harrisonburg Pregnancy Center, Harrisonburg

"I asked about getting on birth control, and she said I should only do natural family planning...she said that condoms are only 86% effective, but natural family planning is 98% effective."⁴

A Woman's Choice, Falls Church

"She told me that condoms are only 85% effective, and that's only if they are good condoms and are used perfectly every time."⁵

Assist Crisis Pregnancy Center, Annandale

"I was told that condoms are not effective. She explained that the failure rate on the box is wrong because it represents the failure rate in factory tests, not in real life."⁶

¹ "SLM Pregnancy Help Center." In-Person Investigation. 24 June 2009.

² "1st Choice Women's Health/Life Line." In-Person Investigation. 5 November 2009.

³ In-Person Investigation. 13 Dec. 2012.

⁴ In-person Investigation. 19 Oct. 2012.

⁵ Telephone Investigation. 30 Jan. 2013.

⁶ In-Person Investigation. 30 Jan. 2013.

Shenandoah County Pregnancy Center, Edinburg

In 2010, many facilities also provided investigators with medically inaccurate literature on birth control and STIs. One particularly troubling graphic depicted a hole in a condom and argued that both sperm and HIV were small enough to “fit through the hole” (Figure 18).

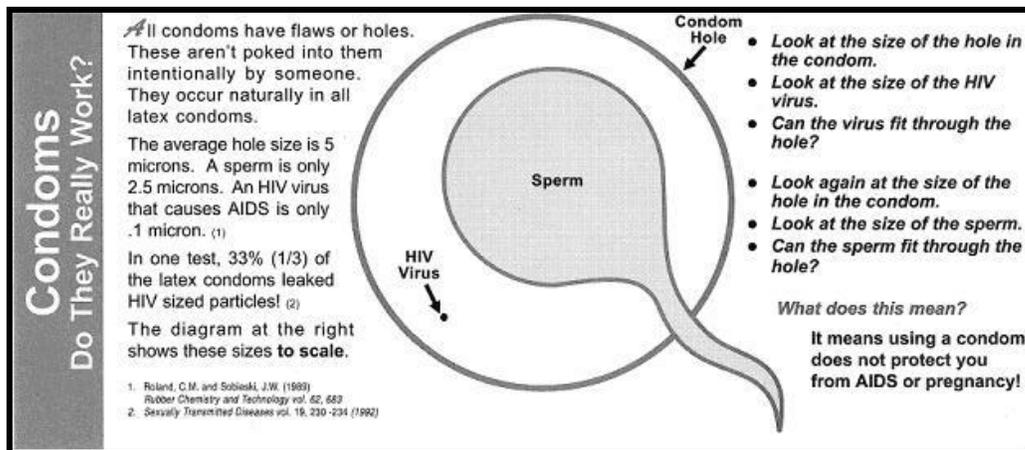


Figure 18

NPCVF's 2013 investigative update determined that Virginia's CPCs continue to provide misleading and inaccurate literature on birth control and STIs, as demonstrated by another pamphlet denouncing the effectiveness of condoms: "You might think that condoms make sex safer, but research shows that's not the case" (Figure 19).

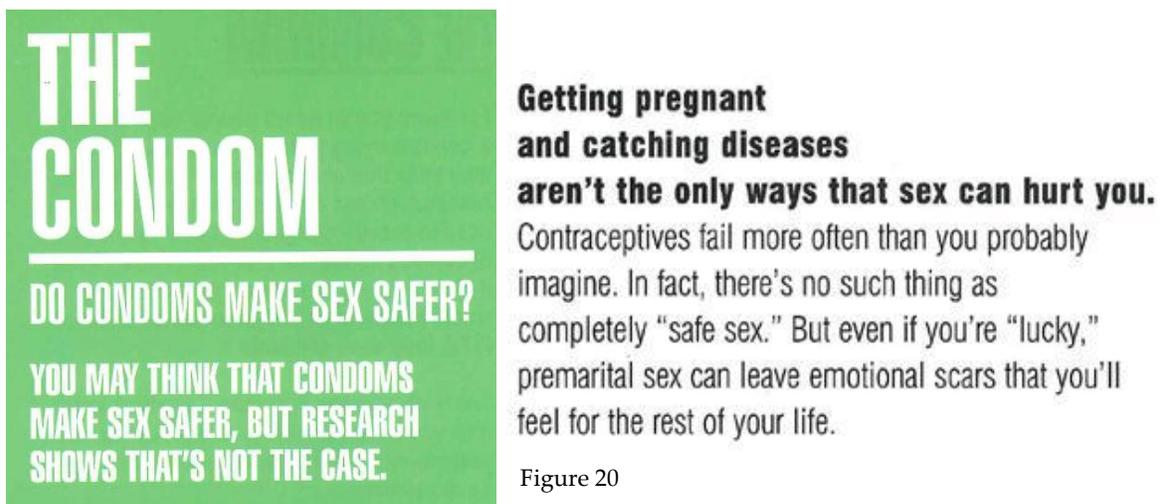


Figure 20

Figure 19

In addition to providing medically inaccurate materials on STIs and birth control, many CPCs surveyed also used scare-tactics when addressing the potential emotional ramifications of premarital sex. One pamphlet outlined potential “emotional difficulties” that sex can trigger,

including “regret, anger, guilt, emotional discomfort, depression, and even attempted suicide” (Figure 22). Another brochure stated that “premarital sex can leave emotional scars that you’ll feel for the rest of your life” (Figure 20).

THE PHYSICAL RISKS OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY
ARE REAL.
BUT THEY’RE NOT
THE ENTIRE STORY...

Figure 21

DEPRESSION (and even attempted suicide)

Sexually active teen girls are more likely to feel depressed than abstinent girls.⁶ Teens who get an STI are also more likely to feel depressed.⁷ And teen girls who have had sex are far more likely to think about or attempt suicide.⁸

Figure 22

NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation believes young people should be given the tools they need to avoid risky sexual behavior, and studies show that comprehensive and medically accurate sex education is the most effective means of preventing unintended pregnancies, particularly among teenage women.⁷

Instead of providing comprehensive and accurate information, many CPCs choose only to promote abstinence and attempt to scare clients away from safe, proven methods of pregnancy prevention. This dissemination of inaccurate information around birth control, sex, and STIs is particularly troubling given the fact that virtually all of CPC clients are sexually active at the time of their visit, and are therefore apt to continue to engage in sexual activity. NPCVF finds it likely that scaring women away from contraceptive methods that prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease actually will increase the risk of sexual infection and unintended pregnancy among CPC clients.

Medically Inaccurate Information about Infertility and Preterm Birth

As in our 2010 investigation, NPCVF’s investigative update found that several CPCs reported a link between abortion, infertility, and preterm birth. Of the 56 centers surveyed, 25 suggested that any type of abortion would make it far more difficult to conceive and carry a healthy baby to term in the future.⁸

⁷ Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001.

⁸ According to the Mayo Clinic, “Abortion rarely results in infertility or pregnancy complications.” “Abortion: Does it affect subsequent pregnancies?” *Mayo Clinic*. Web. 13 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/abortion/AN00633>>.

Injury to the cervix may cause the early loss of a later wanted pregnancy. Scarring, which can block your fallopian tubes, may also occur. This can keep you from becoming pregnant in the future. The risk of miscarriage in later pregnancies is higher if a woman has had two or more abortions.⁹

Risks of any surgical abortion include hemorrhage, infection, infertility, and complications with future pregnancies (i.e. incompetent cervix).¹⁰

Women who undergo one or more induced abortions carry a significantly increased risk of delivering prematurely in the future. Premature delivery is associated with higher rates of cerebral palsy, as well as other complications of prematurity (brain, respiratory, bowel, and eye problems).¹¹

“The counselor said that if I was a certain blood type, an abortion could cause my body to create antibodies that would attack my baby the next time I got pregnant.”¹²

In one video retrieved from a Virginia CPC,¹³ multiple women said that they were infertile due to abortion:

“[The doctor] said ‘you will never have children because of those abortions. What that suction from that machine did is literally pull your tubes down flush with your uterus, and they’re blocked.’”

“We wanted to have more children, but because my uterus and my cervix were so damaged from those abortions, they could not believe that I had [my child].”

“All I wanted to be was a mommy, and because of what I did when I was 16 and 19, I can’t be a mommy.”

These myths are often shared to dissuade women from choosing abortion, as CPC staff members may insist that the current pregnancy could be a woman’s only chance to conceive. As one woman in the video concluded, “It was very traumatic coming to that realization that the only three children I would ever bear, I had killed.”¹⁴

⁹ “The Life Center of Page Valley.” Website Investigation. 13 Mar. 2013. <http://thelifecenterpv.com/abortion.php>

¹⁰ “Little Life Pregnancy Center”. Website Investigation. 13 March 2013. <http://littlifelifepregnancycenter.org/node/3>

¹¹ *Before you Decide*. Care Net. 2008. Received from Pregnancy Help Center of Chesterfield. In-Person Investigation. 8 Jan. 2013.

¹² “Harrisonburg Pregnancy Center.” Telephone Investigation. 30 Jan. 2013.

¹³ *Crossroads of the Heart*. Spectra Educational Videos, 2006. Film retrieved from Pregnancy Support Center of the Tri-Cities. In-person Investigation. 8 Jan. 2013.

¹⁴ “Pregnancy Support Center of the Tri-Cities.” In-person Investigation. 8 Jan. 2013.

Medically Inaccurate Information about Breast Cancer

In our 2010 report, NPCVF found that sixteen CPCs provided literature promoting a link between abortion and breast cancer, while ten investigators reported hearing about a breast cancer-abortion link in person.

NPCV's 2012 investigation revealed that despite concrete medical fact to the contrary, Virginia CPCs continue to perpetrate a link between abortion and breast cancer. Three investigators were told in-person that abortion is linked to breast cancer, and an additional five were told this by phone. Sixteen centers' literature and/or websites suggested that women undergoing abortions would face increased risk for breast cancer.

One investigator relayed the following experience:

"They had me watch a movie that discussed breast cancer as a side effect of abortion. The movie stated that having an abortion can dramatically increase the risk of breast cancer, and that if you have an abortion under the age of 18 or above the age of 32, and also have a history of breast cancer in your family, you are virtually guaranteed to get breast cancer at some point in your life. I asked the counselor later if it was true that there was a link between abortion and breast cancer. She answered 'Yes, well it makes sense, since everything's connected.'"¹⁵

AAA Women for Choice, Manassas

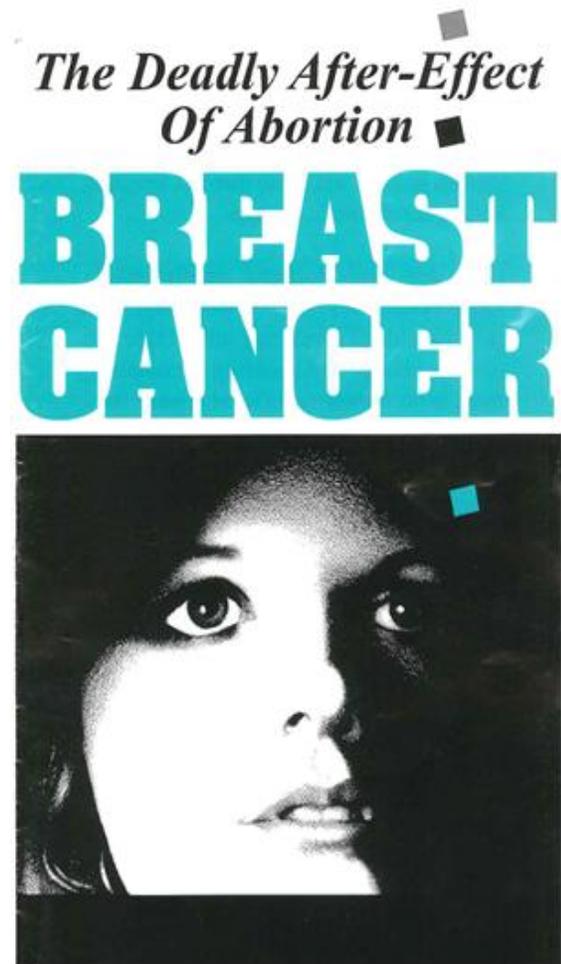
Sixteen CPCs perpetrated this repeatedly debunked myth through online and offline materials. Consider one pamphlet, retrieved at multiple CPCs: "New scientific evidence shows that the increase in abortions worldwide has caused a sharp increase in breast cancer. Over thirty-four studies indicate that women who abort their first pregnancy have a much higher risk of developing cancer "(Figure 23).¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ In addition, this brochure argues that breast cancer due to abortion is much more aggressive than other types: "Dr. H. Olsson found, if she had aborted her first pregnancy, that the cancer was more aggressive, metastasized earlier and was lethal more quickly as compared to women who had completed their first pregnancy."

¹⁵ In-person Investigation. 17 Nov. 2012.

¹⁶ "Crisis Pregnancy Center of Metro Richmond". Telephone Investigation. 6 Dec. 2012.

¹⁷ "Front Royal Pregnancy Center." In-Person Investigation. 10 Aug. 2012.

¹⁸ "AAA Women for Choice". In-Person Investigation. 17 Nov. 2012.



New scientific evidence shows that the increase in abortions worldwide has caused a sharp increase in breast cancer. Over thirty studies indicate that women who abort their first pregnancy have a much higher risk of developing cancer.

Figure 23

Most of these claims, including those within the pamphlet displayed above, were supported by studies at least 2 decades old. NPCVF strongly believes these false and debunked statistics are shared with clients to encourage fear and steer women away from considering their full range of reproductive-health options.

These findings are indeed troubling. But they are even more alarming when examined in the context of Virginia laws restricting abortion rights, which essentially confer government legitimacy on CPCs. Since NPCVF's first report was released, the state enacted two anti-choice laws that have direct implications for CPCs' ability to reach women: a forced-ultrasound and 24-hour delay requirement and the "Choose Life" license plate program. Both of these laws, have impeded—and in some cases foreclosed—many women's ability to access abortion care, while not only expanding but also endorsing CPCs' reach.