

Fetus becomes a child under proposed US law

To the consternation of pro-choice groups, the US government has announced its intention to allow states to make fetuses eligible for health insurance coverage under the federally subsidized State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP, www.hcfa.gov/init/children.htm).

SCHIP, a joint federal-state program, allows states to provide coverage for children under 19 whose uninsured, low-income, working parents don't qualify for Medicaid. The federal proposal would extend coverage to the point of conception to give eligible women prenatal and birthing care.

Medicaid provides prenatal care for many low-income women, but "there are

still tens of thousands every year who are not eligible under current regulations until after their child is born," said Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. About 10.9 million American women of child-bearing age (18-44) have no health insurance.

But to the National Abortion and Reproductive Action League (NARAL) the self-described political arm of the pro-choice movement, the federal proposal is a move to undermine abortion rights by establishing embryos as persons under the law.

NARAL President Kate Michelman says the proposal "is the latest ploy in [the government's] ongoing stealth campaign to have government make abortions ille-

gal." She says the proposal points "to the strategy of undermining a woman's right to choose by ascribing legal rights to embryos." A NARAL policy statement (www.naral.org/mediareources/fact/chip_points.html), says the proposed provision could actually harm women by pitting them against the program's "patients" — the embryos. "Under this proposal, a woman's treatment for a variety of medical conditions might be denied, in favour of the embryo."

"This is not a debate about abortion," Thompson responded, "and those who seek to advocate for children should stop making it so. It is about our undeniable health needs throughout the life cycle." — *Milan Korcok*, Florida

PULSE

Fewer Canadians being prescribed antibiotics

An Ipsos-Reid poll released this year determined that more than half (53%) of adult Canadians were prescribed an antibiotic in the last 3 years, a drop from 62% in 2000.

The poll, conducted for the National Information Program on Antibiotics, found that 89% of those aged 55 or older who had a prescription for an antibiotic filled recently finished all the medication, even if they felt better in a

couple of days. This compares with just 71% of those aged 18 to 34. Women were somewhat more likely than men to finish their medication (83% versus 76%). Almost two-thirds (64%) of noncompliant patients said "feeling better" was the reason they did not take all the drug that was prescribed (see also *In the Literature*, page 776.)

Of those who had recently taken an

antibiotic, 91% strongly agreed or agreed that antibiotics are useful for treating bacterial infections. More than half (53%) incorrectly thought that viral infections can be treated with antibiotics, and 30% also mistakenly agreed that antibiotics can successfully treat most colds and influenza infections. Those aged 18-34 were much more likely (44%) to believe that antibiotics can treat a cold and flu than those aged 35-54 (23%) and 55 or older (25%). Men were more likely than women to think that a cold and/or flu was treatable with antibiotics (36% versus 26%).

Forty percent of those recently treated with an antibiotic said that they had seen or heard of education programs or public awareness campaigns on the use of antibiotics within the past 3 years. Among those who had encountered information on antibiotics, 54% said they were subsequently less likely to request antibiotics from their physician, and 76% said they were subsequently more careful about how they take prescribed antibiotics; 22% said the programs had no impact. — *Shelley Martin*, Senior Analyst, Research, Policy and Planning Directorate, CMA

