

## Solve the accessibility issue by reducing the need?

If Canada wants to reduce its abortion rate, says one Maritime physician, the answer is to work harder to prevent pregnancy. In Nova Scotia, Dr. Christina Toplack and her colleagues at Planned Parenthood introduced an emergency contraception campaign in the spring and summer of 1999, and it appears to have paid off in the target groups: teenagers and women under 24.

With funding from the William H. Kaufman Charitable Foundation, Planned Parenthood campaigners set up a toll-free telephone hotline to educate women about the use of emergency contraception, particularly the "morning-after" pill. Workers distributed 80 000 posters, pamphlets and wallet cards, advertised on buses and in transit shelters, gave media interviews and provided information about emergency contraception to doctors, health clinics and emergency departments. Toplack also provided CME lectures.

In follow-up surveys and random interviews, more than 70% of family doctors said they had used the campaign materials. At the Planned Parenthood Metro Clinic in Halifax, 65%

more women sought emergency contraception during the campaign.

Hospital emergency and outpatient departments and teen health and student health clinics also reported increases in demand for emergency contraception or information about it during the campaign.

The morning-after pill, which must be used within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, is often confused with RU-486, a labour-inducing drug available in the US and Europe. (The morning-after pill will not affect an established pregnancy.) Toplack and Planned Parenthood support the efforts of colleagues in British Columbia and Ontario to make emergency contraception available without a prescription through specially trained pharmacists.

"There are some suggestions that emergency contraception could cut the abortion rate in half if in fact [people] know about it," says Bonnie Johnson, executive director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada. — *Laura Eggertson, Ottawa*