

August 2, 2011

### **In This Update**

[Save the date: Working group meeting 10/25/11](#)

[California Young Women's Collaborative leads focus groups with API young women](#)

[OCs OTC at Let's Talk About Sex Conference](#)

[American Public Health Association and American Academy of Family Physicians to consider policy statements for OTC coverage](#)

[Society of Family Planning award for nationally representative survey](#)

[Session at North American Forum on Family Planning](#)

[Update on survey of international availability of OCs](#)

[About us](#)

[Contact us](#)

### **Dear Working Group Member,**

I am sure that all of you share our excitement about the recently released [US Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\) guidelines regarding preventive services for women](#), which accepted the recommendations of [the Institute of Medicine's report](#). Beginning in August 2012, these guidelines will require new private health insurance plans to provide coverage without cost-sharing for all FDA-approved contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, and patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity. The Institute of Medicine report was quite clear that FDA-approved contraceptive methods include non-prescription methods such as condoms and emergency contraception. It remains to be seen how coverage for non-prescription methods will be implemented, and we hope that HHS will provide more guidance on this in the near future.

Below is information about several other activities related to the working group, including information about our next meeting. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments about these updates. Also, please let me know if you have relevant news you would like to share in a future update.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan", is positioned below the "Thanks," text.

Daniel Grossman  
Senior Associate, Ibis Reproductive Health

**Save the date: Next OCs OTC Working Group meeting October 25 in Washington, DC**

The next working group meeting will take place on October 25 in Washington, DC, immediately following the North American Forum on Family Planning. We are still developing the agenda for the meeting, but we anticipate that it will focus on reasons for prioritizing a progestin-only pill to be the first OTC oral contraceptive; we will also discuss new information about the financial impact of an OTC switch for OCs, including the implications of the new HHS guidelines.

Space will be limited at the meeting, so **please let [Kate Grindlay](#) know if you are interested in attending.**

**Working group partners with California Young Women's Collaborative and National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum to conduct focus groups with young Asian and Pacific Islander women on their opinions regarding access to OTC OCs**

A group of University of California, Irvine (UCI) students from the California Young Women's Collaborative (CYWC) have joined with the OCs OTC Working Group, and collected data for a qualitative study to assess women's experiences with birth control and their opinions on oral contraceptives as an over-the-counter product. CYWC, a program funded by the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, aims at increasing students' public health research skills and civic engagement within the Asian American community. The students are helping to address the gap on data about contraception use and attitudes among the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) population, and since slightly more than half (53%) of the UCI's student body consists of APIs, students have access to a large cohort of young adult, API females.

In July, the students completed four focus groups with API young women, and they performed all aspects of data collection, including recruiting participants, facilitating focus groups, and transcribing the recorded sessions. To recruit participants, they passed out flyers in high traffic areas around campus, including classrooms, libraries, and even posted flyers in bathroom stalls! Additionally, they made class announcements and emailed professors, asking them to pass the information along to their students. Recruitment efforts were more difficult than expected, because UC Irvine is in summer session and many students have gone home for the break, but they were able to complete the focus groups as scheduled. Student co-leaders, Denise Tran and Liz Wong, led the team and worked hard to ensure a successful study. The student researchers have been excited about this project, as this opportunity has been a great learning experience and enabled them to hone their research skills while also making a contribution to an important public health issue. Ibis staff are now working on analyzing the focus group data.



The OCs OTC Research Assistants at UC Irvine. Back row: Liz Wong, Jedrek Chua, Deanna Thoi Front row: Christine Lee, Denise Tran, Kelly Bui, Lisa Wu

### OCs OTC at Let's Talk about Sex Conference

The OCs OTC Working Group sponsored a session at [SisterSong's Let's Talk about Sex Conference](#) for reproductive justice advocates in Miami in July, entitled, "The Pill: Over the Counter and Under Your Control." Reproductive justice advocate Aimee Thorne-Thompson moderated the interactive session, which included panelists Vanessa Cullins, Planned Parenthood Federation of America; Kimberly Inez McGuire, Reproductive Health Technologies Project; writer and consultant Belle Taylor-McGhee; and Britt Wahlin, Ibis Reproductive Health. Participants expressed enthusiasm for moving OCs over the counter, mentioning that young women and immigrants in particular could benefit from a switch. The working group also launched an online survey at the conference to collect reproductive rights and justice advocates' perspectives and opinions on making OCs OTC. For more information about the survey, please contact [Kate Grindlay](#).

### American Public Health Association and American Academy of Family Physicians to consider policy statements regarding insurance coverage for OTC contraceptives

At the upcoming meeting of the [American Public Health Association](#) (APHA), a proposed policy entitled "Removing Financial and Other Barriers to Over-the-Counter Contraception" will be considered for approval by the organization's Governing Council. The policy, which was developed by Susan Berke Fogel of the [National Health Law Program](#) and Dan Grossman, urges APHA to advocate for both Medicaid and private insurance coverage for OTC contraceptives and to make such coverage available without requiring a prescription. If you are a member of APHA, you can access the proposed policy [here](#), or you can email [Dan](#) more information.

In addition, the [California Academy of Family Physicians](#) (CAFP) is sponsoring a resolution

entitled "Removing Barriers to Over-the-Counter Contraception for Low-Income Women," which will be considered this September at the national [Congress of Delegates](#), the policy-making body of the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#). A delegation including both California and New York advocates will provide testimony at the September meeting. CAFP Member Suzan Goodman, MD, MPH stated that the policy change would "help to minimize barriers for women such as unnecessary doctors visits by encouraging agencies and insurers to provide Medicaid coverage for FDA-approved OTC contraceptives, and not to require a prescription for such coverage."

### **Working group receives funding from Society of Family Planning to perform a nationally representative survey of women's opinions regarding access to OTC OCs**

Dan Grossman received an award from the [Society of Family Planning](#) to conduct a nationally representative survey of women's opinions about over-the-counter access to OCs. We will conduct the survey with Knowledge Networks using their KnowledgePanel, a nationally representative, probability-based, online non-volunteer access panel. We hope to have results from the survey by the middle of next year. Please click [here](#) for the full project abstract or contact [Dan](#) for more information.

### **Session at the North American Forum on Family Planning: Exploring the risks and benefits of moving oral contraceptives over the counter**

At the [North American Forum on Family Planning](#) in Washington, DC, on October 23 at 1:30 pm, the working group will present a panel that will discuss the risks and benefits of moving OCs OTC. In particular, we aim to review recent research findings, highlight some of the lessons learned from the OTC switch for emergency contraception, discuss the possible cost implications in light of implementation of the Affordable Care Act, and explore the potential impact on clinics. If you will be attending the Forum, we hope you will join us for this session.

### **Update on survey of international availability of OCs**

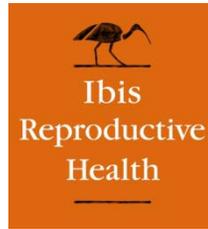
Thanks to the wide dissemination of the survey on international availability of OCs, we are learning a great deal about OTC availability around the world. We have received over 300 responses with information on 103 countries, in many of which OCs are available at least *de facto* over the counter. We are currently working to get information about some remaining key countries, and will then analyze the data and prepare a map of OTC availability. Thanks again for your help completing and disseminating the survey.

### **About us**

The Oral Contraceptives (OCs) Over-the-Counter (OTC) Working Group is an informal coalition of reproductive health and rights organizations, nonprofit research and advocacy groups, university-based researchers, and prominent clinicians who share an interest in women's health and access to contraception. Our goal is to evaluate objectively the risks and benefits of demedicalizing contraceptive care, with an eye toward improving access to OCs and potentially other hormonal contraceptive methods by making them available without a

prescription.

The working group is coordinated by Ibis Reproductive Health.



[www.ibisreproductivehealth.org](http://www.ibisreproductivehealth.org)

## Contact us

**For questions or inquiries, please contact us at:**

Ibis Reproductive Health  
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Tel.: 510-986-8932  
Fax: 510-896-8960  
Email: [OCsOTC@ocsotc.org](mailto:OCsOTC@ocsotc.org)

[www.OCsOTC.org](http://www.OCsOTC.org)