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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY TO
COMMUNICATIONS CONTROL CENTER

February 9, 2004

Secretary Tommy G. Thompson
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

I am writing as a board certified family physician, a member of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), and a member of the Society of Teachers of Family medicine (STFM) to support over-the-counter (OTC) status for Plan B emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs). I have reviewed the scientific literature and believe the evidence clearly supports this change. As you may know, the AAFP has also taken the position of supporting over-the-counter status for emergency contraception. I agree with the FDA advisory panel's finding that the data shows ECPs to be safe and effective for reducing unintended pregnancy and that it is appropriate for over-the-counter use. I urge you to support OTC access to ECPs.

Concerns that ECPs are not safe are unsubstantiated and contradict the scientific evidence presented to the FDA. Concerns that emergency contraception causes increased sexual activity among adolescents and teens are equally unfounded. Research shows that ECPs do not increase sexual activity and that they have a significant public health benefit by reducing unintended pregnancies among women of all ages, including teens.

The sooner emergency contraceptive pills are taken after unprotected intercourse, the more effective they can be. Evidence shows that some women still find it difficult or impossible to get emergency contraception from a provider or health care professional in time. Like most of my colleagues, I am not available to provide it 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The evidence is clear: ECPs should be available over the counter for the women who can benefit. All women deserve the opportunity to safely and effectively protect themselves from unintended pregnancy.

Sincerely,

Larry Leeman, MD, MPH
Co-Medical Director, University Hospital Mother-Baby Unit
Director, Family Practice Maternal Child Health Program
Assistant Professor, Department of Family & Community Medicine
Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology

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