

Mr Addison

CHIEF SCIENTIST

cc. Messrs. Redwood, Letwin, Booth (Policy Unit).

HUMAN LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

After our interesting and useful conversation today, I thought you might like a few notes on the areas in which more public information needs to be presented, so that an informed debate can take place after the Powell Bill and before the Government's Bill to deal with the other Warnock matters.

The Warnock Report is in my view both intellectually unsatisfying and deplorably incomplete (setting aside what the Catholic Church considers to be the bias in the Committee's original appointments and the wrongness of many of its conclusions in morality and in practice). The Report omits full discussion and presentation of the following matters:

- * Causes of infertility;
- * Remedies for infertility;
- * Possible medical dangers of fertilisation in vitro;
- * Analysis of present and expected benefits from experiments.

If the Government adopts your suggestion of a White Paper before early legislation on this topic, it might perhaps include the matters listed above, taking account of some of the considerations below:

Causes of infertility: The report says little about the causes of infertility, a curious omission in view of its subject-matter and terms of reference. It admits that the techniques it describes can help no more than one infertile couple in 20; yet it fails to mention some of the most prominent of the avoidable causes of infertility - notably sexually-transmitted diseases; previous abortion; previous sterilisation; and use of intra-uterine contraceptive devices and abortifacient pills. All these carry a high risk of causing infertility, whether temporary or permanent, through tubal obstruction (and I have an uncomfortable suspicion that, because doctors make much extra money by performing abortions, or by prescribing contraceptives on the NHS, some of them have not been as honest as they should have been about these and other dangers in such practices). It is arguable (in the absence of detailed statistics, which should surely be collected before permissive legislation is tabled) that public education leading to avoidance of these causes of infertility would provide a solution in many more cases than IVF and other such techniques.

Remedies for infertility: The Warnock Report scarcely considers remedies for infertility other than AI and IVF. It is likely that some less morally objectionable and biomedically dangerous methods would have a greater success-rate as well as being cheaper and safer. For instance, although complete azoospermia in men is untreatable, men with borderline sperm counts can be helped by counselling to educate them and their wives to concentrate sexual activity at ovulation. In women, tubal obstruction caused by

venereal disease, intra-uterine devices, appendicitis, etc., can sometimes be reversed, though many of the causes of tubal obstruction are avoidable. Tubal microsurgery can be helpful in 30-40% of cases; and in reversals of sterilisation the success-rate is higher still. A more recently-developed technique, similar to IVF but without its moral or medical dangers, is low tubal ovum transfer: the ovum is harvested by laparoscopy and, instead of being fertilised in vitro, is immediately transferred to the womb, where it is fertilised in the normal way. It is regrettable that the Committee, which received evidence of these techniques and of the remarkable success-rate achievable with them, did not consider more carefully their biomedical and moral advantages. It would obviously be useful to know how many of the small number of cases for which IVF is thought medically appropriate could in fact be at least as successfully treated by methods which carry no moral objections and few medical dangers.

Medical dangers of fertilisation in vitro: The Committee's treatment of these dangers is skimpy. The following are among the problems: a very high number of embryos are destroyed for every successful IVF delivery (the Report underestimates the ratio of deaths to live births); the risk of foetal abnormality arising from IVF is unknown and should, therefore, be pointed out to infertile couples until enough IVF births have taken place to allow serious data to be accumulated; the use of clomiphene citrate or chorionic gonadotrophin to produce multiple ovulation for IVF may lead to the formation of ovarian cysts, a further cause of infertility; and, where tubes are damaged without complete obstruction, there is an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy (Dr. Steptoe's first pregnancy was ectopic).

Present and future benefits from experimentation: You have appealed to the opinion of "the medical elite" that experimentation has produced and will produce worthwhile results. I can, of course, appeal to opinions just as "elite" which suggest otherwise. This point need not be further elaborated here, since there is still a chance (though not, in my guess, a good one) that the Powell Bill will get through Parliament. But the case for experimentation, which Warnock fails to put, does need to be properly presented before any subsequent legislation is moved in this field.

I hope these notes will be useful. They outline some of the subjects which need to be presented - preferably in laymen's language - before the present largely emotional debate can be replaced by an informed one. And, as a last point, the complicated mess the DHSS has got itself into over the moment when life begins (yet another question fudged by Warnock) needs to be sorted out.

CHRISTOPHER MONCKTON



20 March, 1985.

'causing record level of disease'

By DAVID FLETCHER Health Services Correspondent

THE sexual freedom that began in the "swinging" sixties has resulted in unprecedented levels of present-day disease and infertility, doctors stated yesterday.

As many as one in seven couples are now infertile, many of them as a result of abortions or sexually-transmitted diseases caught in their youth.

Revealing these facts yesterday, doctors and teachers belonging to the Family Welfare Committee called on parents to turn the tide against promiscuity and teach their children the value of chastity before marriage and fidelity within wedlock.

The committee, part of the inter-denominational Order of Christian Unity, said in a report: "As a direct result of precocious sexual intercourse, a woman runs an increased risk of developing cancer of the neck of the womb at a relatively early age — her late twenties, early thirties."

Increased risk

Children did not make long-lasting relationships and a young adolescent was likely to have more than one sexual partner if she had one at all.

"This increases the risk of infection by one or more venereal diseases.

"While most of these can be cured if they are diagnosed early, there are some for which there is, as yet, no cure — e.g. herpes," the report says.

"There are others where the bacteria no longer react to antibiotics — e.g. certain strains of gonorrhoea.

"Even where the disease can be eradicated, serious damage, resulting in blockage of the tubes and permanent sterility, is not infrequent."

The report is highly critical of family planning clinics for failing to warn youngsters seeking contraceptives of the dangers they are running by indulging in early sex.

"We have no evidence that youth advisory services and others are alerting children to the possible and serious ill-effects of early sexual experience and the use of contraceptive drugs and devices."

The report admits that parents have an uphill struggle to stand out against the united front of adolescents, pop culture and often school, but urges them to do so.

Dr Denis Sugrue, a hospital consultant specialising in genito-urinary medicine, said that sexual infections were harming the health and welfare of increasing numbers of people.

"Over half a million new

cases of sexually-transmitted disease were presented at hospital departments in this country last year."

Miss Dawn Guinness, headmistress of the independent girls' school, Felixstowe College, said the disastrous consequences of giving sex education to girls that explained the mechanics of contraception without discussing marriage and the dangers of promiscuity were now becoming apparent.

She said: "This report shows that the counter argument to the permissive lobby is based on established facts.

"The problems connected with counselling single girls who think they need contraceptives are not to be under-estimated.

"Such girls need to be offered pastoral and moral guidance as well as medical advice to point out the dangers of early use of contraceptives."

Children and Contraception: Failure of a Policy... OCU, 58, Handover Gardens, London, SE11 5TN. £1.15.

NUJ CHIEF'S RETIREMENT PLAN ENDORSED

By Our Industrial Staff

The executive of the National Union of Journalists yesterday endorsed arrangements for the early retirement of Mr Kenneth Ashton, its £20,000-a-year general secretary, who has been the subject of an inquiry into complaints about revisions to his pension arrangements.

Next week's NUJ annual conference in Bristol will be asked to ratify a plan under which Mr Ashton, 59, would receive a lump sum and a partially-enhanced pension.

Mr Ashton is not expected to appear at the conference. He is already on paid leave and under the terms of the proposed arrangements would remain on leave until formal retirement in three months' time.

Under the arrangements it is believed Mr Ashton would be paid two years' salary, and his pension would build up to the level it would have been had he served his full term to the age of 65.

HARDER

By Our Medical Consultant

BOYS are more vulnerable to the effects of their parents' divorce than girls, a London conference was told yesterday.

Dr Martin Richards of Cambridge University said that, not only were boys more likely than girls to suffer from psychological disturbances with excessive aggression as a result of divorce of their parents than girls, but they were generally more at risk.

They had more illnesses and were more accident-prone. Even before birth, they were more vulnerable.

Dr Richards considered that the courts should devote more time and care to divorce cases, especially in dealing with the future of the children. Both parents should attend to be informed that they both continue to have parental responsibilities.

Brain damage

Opening the conference on "Family Stress and Children," Dr Jack Dominion of the Marriage Research Centre said one marriage in three broke down with an annual impact on 165,000 children.

Prof. Philip Graham, Professor of Child Psychiatry at Great Ormond Street Hospital, said that the impact of family stress on children could lead to temperamental disturbances, language delay affecting both speech and written words, and physical effects, especially on the brain, leading to very low ability.

He thought that mothers going out to work made very little difference to psychological disturbances in children. Working mothers were less likely to be depressed.

LAWRENCE PLAQUE IN POETS' CORNER

A plaque dedicated to D. H. Lawrence will be placed behind memorials to Lord Byron and Dylan Thomas in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

Mr Leslie Parkes, secretary of the D. H. Lawrence Society, said: "There is a lack of space in Poets' Corner, in fact there are no spaces left on the wall, so we've chosen a spot on the floor next to Lord Byron and Dylan Thomas.

The plaque will feature Lawrence's Phoenix symbol, his date of birth and a piece of his writing, yet to be chosen. This year marks the centenary of Lawrence's birth, and an international festival is to be held in September at his home town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire.

Princess Margaret
Edward Carper
Westminster Ab
a memorial s

Call for action

By TERENCE S

INTERNATIO
I combat the
motherhood a
Office Minister
Council of Eu
ference on hu
in Vienna yes

Regarding the
human rights
developments in
technology, Mr
the Government
introduce legisla
such agencies in

"But the acti
rogacy agencies
national boundar
a strong case for
co-operation to
practice so fraud
social and legal
declared.

To the first s
conference of
council he was
being taken by l
ing medical de
human fertilisa
ology and which
on by Baron
committee.

Mr Renton w
a paper deliver
Badinter, the P
Justice, who s
that surrogat