

Teen gets early introduction to intrusive government

My daughter would like everyone to know that she is not pregnant. She wants you to know because, after six months, she is off Accutane.

For those of you who aren't parents of teenagers, Accutane is the wonder drug of the new millennium (the patent expired in 2002). Six months of pills and some potentially nasty side effects later, your kid's zits are history. My daughter's case may or may not be typical, but I've never seen a med with such dramatic results. A few months ago, she had some pretty serious acne issues. Now she could do Dove commercials.

So why is she shouting to the world that she's not pregnant? Because she's had to upload that information to the Internet for a while now, so she figures the rest of the world might as well know.

Accutane is a teratogen. That means it can cause birth defects. To ensure no one ever gets pregnant on the drug, the FDA now requires anyone who wants Accutane to go to a special Web site and answer a bunch of very personal questions. Only after you convince the computer that you know how to avoid pregnancy will your doctor fill out an Accutane prescription.

And this isn't a one-time deal. You have to log in and keep this up every month you're on the drug.

This got so ludicrous it became a running joke in our family. "So Erica, are you pregnant today? Because you know you're not supposed to be if you're on Accutane." "So Erica, me and Mom want to be grandparents someday, but not till you're married and off Accutane. OK?" You get the idea.



OPINION

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Contributing columnist

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Unfortunately for liberals, there really are big differences between teenage boys and girls in how they approach sexual activity. These differences are complex, but they are real. The best evidence suggests that those differences are rooted in the biological fact that (hold on everybody, big news coming up) girls can get pregnant, boys can't.

That's why the girls' Accutane literature is the size of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while for guys it's more like a comic book. Boys and girls are just different, and there are times when it's important to acknowledge that. I think social conservatives have always understood this.

But many social conservatives, I sus-

pect, will not be signing up their daughters for Accutane any time soon. In order to get a prescription, you've got to put your teenage FCBP ("Female of Child Bearing Potential") on not one but two forms of birth control. And here's the rub: Neither one can be abstinence. Yes, it's true, a program developed during a Republican presidency and Republican-controlled Congress does not recognize a pledge of abstinence as an effective way to prevent pregnancy. You can go on the pill, you can use an IUD. If you want your Accutane, you can promise to use any number of scientifically tested ways to avoid conception. But abstinence isn't permitted to be one of them, because an abstinence pledge just doesn't work very well.

Now that my daughter's time with Accutane is done, I'm struck by how the science behind the program busts some deeply held myths. Neither liberal nor conservative parents will be wild about putting their girls on Accutane.

One of the common threads of teen sex education programs is to minimize differences

between boys and girls. Sex education classes are routinely given to mixed audiences with the egalitarian message "If you choose to be sexually active, here's what you should think about." It's all very consistent with the left's general discomfort with sex differences and its obsession with "fairness."

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To be fair, there's plenty in the Accutane protocol that bugs me, too. Why, in a free society, should people be forced to answer personal questions over the Internet just to get an acne treatment? Why can't they be informed of the risks and then decide for themselves? Why is zero risk of birth defects from Accutane the only social goal worth considering? Those questions are all conspicuously missing from the Web site's FAQ.

So no matter what perspective you come from, there's going to be something you don't like about the Accutane protocol. It's a hassle, no doubt about it. But if I have to choose between saving a few hours online and knocking out my daughter's zits, I'll pick the latter. So to speak.

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