

ARHP Editorial

In our work, we rely each day on scientific evidence and principles to guide our decision-making—whether we are helping a patient choose the birth control method that is right for her, or designing studies to be as accurate and unbiased as possible. We expect nothing less from the government agencies that craft our nation's scientific and public health policy.

In the past few months, we have witnessed an alarming departure from principles of evidence-based policy at the national level of the United States. Scientific information about condoms and about abortion and breast cancer provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute, respectively, has been altered to be consistent with the Administration's abstinence-only and pro-life politics. Appointees to scientific advisory panels, even to study sections that assess the quality of research proposals, are being graded on their views on political issues, such as needle exchange programs, and stem-cell research.

This isn't simply politics as usual. Never before has political ideology intruded so deeply into scientific and public health decision-making. Public health policy decisions should be based on the best available science, in order to reach the best possible outcome. Turning this process into yet another political contest puts our nation's health in jeopardy.

The Association of Reproductive Health Professionals has drafted a statement of principles to safeguard science-based policy-making. To date, this statement has gathered the support of almost 90 organizations representing over two million health care providers and advocates, including the American Public Health Association, American Medical Women's Association, American Academy of Physician Assistants, HIV Medicine Association, Hadassah, National Women's Law Center, AIDS Action, and many other groups. Thousands of individuals have signed on as well.

The statement summary, *Preserving Core Values in Science*, proposes principles to guide the formulation of public health policies:

As individuals, and as organizations representing health care providers, researchers, and educators in

the United States, the undersigned are writing because we are deeply concerned about

- the adverse effect on our nation's health that will result from allowing sectarian beliefs and political ideology rather than science and medical evidence dictate public health policy, and
- the waste of scarce health resources when health and education programs are funded on the basis of ideology rather than evidence of effectiveness. Therefore, we urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to adopt the following principles to guide HHS agencies responsible for public health, research, and public policy decisions including federal regulatory activities:
- that national public health policy and information provided by the federal government should be based on principles of science and evidence-based medicine;
- that public health policy, information, and evaluation, as well as funding for public health services, education, and scientific and medical research, should not be subjected to political or ideological censorship; and
- that scientific and public health recommendations and decisions should be undertaken by expert scientists in each field, selected because of their outstanding knowledge, experience, and professional accomplishments, and not for their sectarian beliefs or political affiliations.

We invite you to take a moment to read and add your support to this statement, available on-line at www.arhp.org/signon/. We hope that you will join us in our efforts to ensure the integrity of the scientific process, further scientific excellence, and keep science independent from coercion or special interests.

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