Testimony in opposition to H.B. 293

As a Registered Nurse in Labor and Delivery, I cannot express strongly enough how frequently I am dealing with teens. The majority of my patients are between the ages of 15-21 years old, but it is not uncommon to have girls as young as 12 years old seeking our help, advice, treatment and education. The conversations that I am having with them are consistently centered around decisions they once made that have now caused them to face life consequences they never thought they would be dealing with.

As a health care provider, I take it as my responsibility to educate and inform teens on their bodies, medications, etc. As a nurse, I see it as my responsibility to compassionately help teens process their past actions into present reality. It is not an quick solution to just meet with my patients for brief periods of time with the hopes that what I have shared with them will truly "sink in". I know this to be true because many of my young teen moms return within a year: pregnant, scared, confused, and unprepared. And it is rare that their partner is involved.

An example of this is a patient I recently took care of who was 18 years old coming in to deliver her third baby. There was no father, no family and no friends with her as this young girl prepared to once again face motherhood without any support. The emotional toll this took on my patient was real, and as I sat at her bedside holding her hand as she cried, I could see that there was a depth to her hurt I could not reach. There was so much I wanted to share with her and so little time. I later came to find out that the father of her child was out on the streets getting high that night and her mother refused to come in saying it wasn't her responsibility. This patient also learned that night that she was infected with Chlamydia, something she'd never had in previous appointments and was a result of her boyfriend sleeping around with other women and then infecting her.

These experiences may sound like ones people read about in magazines or see on talk shows; something that happens, but not really that often or not in their community. This could not be further from the truth. This is the norm. Something needs to be done. Whose responsibility is it then to teach my patient before she returns 9 months from now?

Providing middle school and high school teens with accurate education that incorporates every aspect of their sexual health is needed. Teens need to be given honest truth along with direction to find their convictions and stick to them. I wish I could have meet the young girl mentioned above when she was 14 years old and looking for answers to all the emotions she was feeling at the time. I wish I could have told her she didn't have to follow in the footsteps of her mother. I wish I could have helped her process through the emotional consequences she would face if she continued to view her body as separate from her heart. And I wish I could have been there to meet up with her and her friends to equip them with the facts on sex and how it isn't something to take lightly, I really believe I might have helped change the outcomes of so many of my teen patients and their partners.

Teenagers need a program that meets them on their level and shows genuine interest in them and in doing so I know it will prepare them to made valuable decisions that will go on to impact their future relationships. By not giving them all their options we inevitably encourage them to harm themselves, to not take seriously the consequences of sexuality, and it robs them of one of their first opportunities to find confidence in the decisions that they make for themselves.

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